

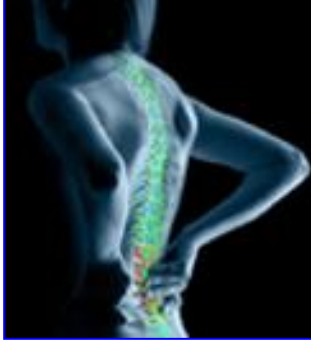


EMPLOYEE HEALTH INITIATIVE: BACK SAFETY

Sore Back? Swim. Jog. Walk.

The sooner you get moving, the sooner you'll feel better

More than 80 per cent of us will experience back pain at some point in our lives; so it's vital that you know the facts. The good news is that health care professionals believe with regular activity and proper body mechanics you'll feel better within a few weeks. It's your choice-- and your back.



Keep it Moving

With regular activity, healthy eating and a positive attitude, you can help your back stay strong and pain-free. **ACTIVITY** is good for your back! It develops and stretches muscles and joints; keeps you flexible; prevents your joints from seizing up; gives you stronger bones; keeps you fit by working your heart and lungs; and reduces pain by releasing natural chemicals.

Don't Take It Lying Down

Even when you have some pain, you can still participate in low-impact activities. Try these suggestions to get you moving:

- It's a stretch: warm up with slow, gentle stretches before you exercise.
- Make a splash: be gentle to your joints by swimming or doing water exercises.
- Walk this way: head outside or to the mall for a brisk walk.
- No place like home: get moving in your own space with an exercise DVD.

And remember: activity not only keeps back pain at bay, it also perks up your spirits!

On the lookout: Does your work make you hurt?

Risk factors are job tasks and body movements that can lead to injury. Finding the risk factors in your job is the first step toward preventing back injuries. Back sprain and strain injuries happen bit by bit. Many injuries do not happen all at once. The following job tasks have the biggest risks: Twisting while lifting or carrying; Stooping down low to lift; Lifting or reaching above your shoulder; Lifting objects far from your body; Frequent lifting without adequate rest between lifts; Pulling and dragging; Sitting or standing in one position for a long time; Lifting bulky or awkward objects; and Lifting heavy objects.

Preventing back injuries

The lower portion of your back experiences more physical stress than any other part of your body; however, it's also the strongest part of your body. It's important to know what kinds of exertion create too much load on your low back, and how you can use good lifting and carrying techniques to reduce the chance of injury.

Situations that may create this type of stress include:

Sedentary jobs and lifestyles; Obesity (increased weight on the spine and pressure on the discs); Strenuous sports (such as football and gymnastics); Lifting or exerting incorrectly; Poor standing and/or sitting posture; and Sleeping on a sagging mattress.

Help prevent back pain by:

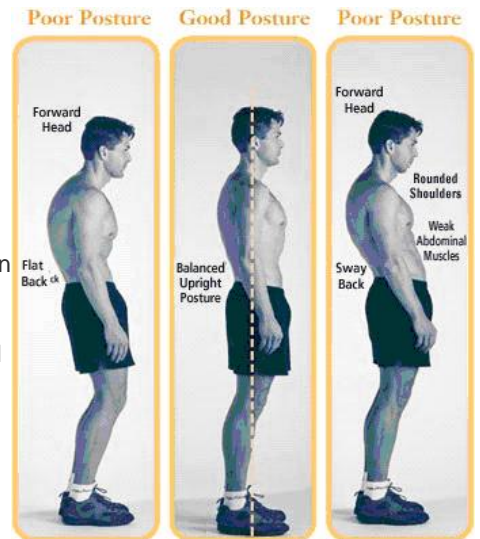
Exercising regularly-- it helps to prevent injuries and assists in recovery; Stretching before participating in activity; Quitting smoking; Losing weight; Maintaining correct posture; Driving with comfortable supportive seats; Sleeping on your side with knees drawn up, or on your back with a pillow under bent knees; Lifting by bending at the knees, not the waist; Varying your position when standing or working; Reducing emotional stress that causes muscle tension; and if you Use good standing posture when standing and sitting will all help prevent back pain.

Standing

When standing, hold your body so that the top of your head, the centre of your torso and the bottoms of your feet create a straight vertical line. Try not to keep your body in any one position for too long. Periodically adjust your body to prevent fatigue.

Sitting

- If your job involves long periods of sitting, don't let your pelvis tilt; this flattens the lower back, which can cause pain and discomfort. A well-designed chair, a back support or even a pillow can correct this problem.
- When sitting correctly, the pelvis is in a neutral position; that is, it is supported along its natural curve allowing the muscles to relax.
- Position the height of the seat so that your knees are level with or higher than your hips. If you sit at a keyboard, try to place the reference material at eye level so that you don't have to look down or lean over.
- Sitting puts a greater load on the lower back than standing or walking. To relieve this load, stretch or get up and walk around several times throughout the day.





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Lifting

When lifting or carrying objects (even light ones):

- Place your feet shoulder-width apart for good balance
- Bend your knees
- Keep the load close to the centre of your body
- Lift gradually and smoothly without jerking
- Pivot with your feet, don't twist your back while lifting
- Coordinate your lift when working with a partner

For a healthy back, it's important to build strong, flexible muscles that support the spinal column and help you to maintain good posture. Weak or tight muscles make back injury more likely and recovery more difficult. You can help keep your muscles healthy by exercising and stretching regularly.



Four Basic Exercises for Good Back Care

The following exercises are helpful for many people. They can be done every day in the order listed below.

Note: *Everyone's body is different. Don't do any exercise that causes pain or gets more difficult to do over time. If the exercise relieves pain or gets easier after a few repetitions, keep doing it.*

If you are under medical care for a back problem or if you have back pain, be careful. Ask your health-care provider before you try these exercises.

THE PELVIC TILT

The pelvic tilt exercise helps strengthen your stomach, buttocks, and thigh muscles as well as stretching the lower back muscles. This exercise flattens the back and then let the back return to its natural curve.

- 1 Lie flat on your back on a hard surface with head resting on a small pillow.
- 2 Bend knees and hips so both feet are flat on the hard surface.
- 3 Push lower back flat to the floor. Make sure your back is flat by trying to place your hand between your back and the hard surface. When done correctly, your hand shouldn't fit.
- 4 Tighten your "stomach" (abdominal) muscles.
- 5 Tighten your "buttock" (gluteal) muscles.
- 6 Lift your hips from the floor and tilt your whole pelvis forward while keeping your back flat against the hard surface.
- 7 Hold for a count of ten.
- 8 Slowly relax.
- 9 Repeat this exercise ten times.

The best way to do this exercise is on the floor. You can also do it against a wall. Once you are familiar with the "feel" of the pelvic tilt, you can do this exercise in any position and you can practice at work or at home. The pelvic tilt can be done standing up against a wall or while you are standing in line, waiting at a red light, or wherever you can focus on your back for a few minutes.

LUMBAR STRETCHES



When lumbar muscles are tight, they become shortened and interfere with bending, twisting, and pelvic rotating. Keeping these muscles stretched also helps keep the natural curves of the spine in shape.

- 1 Lie flat on your back on a floor or hard surface with your head on a small pillow.
- 2 Bend your knees and slowly bring them toward your chest. Reach your hand behind your thigh to help bend the knees. (Note: pulling from the top of the knee isn't good for the knees.) Don't bounce.
- 3 Keep your head on the pillow and elevate your butt as high as possible off the floor. Your knees should be as close as possible to your chest.
- 4 Hold this position for a count of 10. Relax, but continue to hold onto your thighs.
- 5 Again, pull knees as close to your chest as possible. Do this exercise 10 times.

REVERSE SITUPS

Many people have weak abdominal ("stomach") muscles and tend to arch their backs while doing sit-ups. That's why we recommend "reverse" sit-ups to strengthen the three groups of muscles that make the abdomen strong.

- 1 Sit on the floor in an upright position with knees bent.
- 2 Lock hands together behind your head and hold your arms out to your side.
- 3 Tighten your stomach muscles and slowly lean back about 15 degrees, which is like going from 12 noon to 11 o'clock on a timepiece. Hold this position for a count of 5, and 10 if you can.
- 4 Slowly lean back to the 10 o'clock position. Hold and count again.
- 5 Return slowly to an upright position. Repeat the whole exercise.

References & Resources for More Information:

[Occupational Safety & Health Administrations](#) (OSHA); [BackActive](#); [Cleveland Clinic](#); [Harvard Health Beat](#).