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Back Injury Prevention and Safe Lifting Techniques

Your back is in motion all day, every day, even when you sleep. It bends when you sit, twists when you turn, lifts when you stand and supports you when you walk. An injured back can be uncomfortable or it can be disabling. By learning a few back injury prevention techniques, you may be able make your work day safer.

Here are some tips:

- When you are driving, make sure your back is well-supported and that you use good posture. To prevent back strain, keep the steering wheel close enough that your knees are slightly flexed and higher than your hips.
- When you have to lift an object, always plan ahead. Decide how you are going to pick up the load, carry it and set it down, then check the route for obstructions. Always get assistance if the load is too heavy or too awkward.
- As you lift, position your feet close to the load and squat - don't bend down. Rise to a standing position, using the strong muscles in your legs rather than the weaker ones in your back. Don't twist your body when carrying the load. Lower yourself to a squatting position as you set it down.
- Take several short rest breaks at work by standing up and doing a few minutes of stretching exercises. If your job requires you to stand all day, try placing one foot on a slightly higher surface to relax tight back muscles.
- When you sleep at night, curl up on your side and place a pillow between your knees for added support. If you do sleep on your back, place pillows under your bent knees to relieve the strain on your back muscles.

Most of you have heard the general rules of safe lifting. Remember to "Get a firm grip on the load, keep it close, bend at the knees, use your legs to lift the load, and keep your spine in the natural position (with an arch in your lower back)." These principles always apply and should be incorporated into every lift--if possible!

Given the enormous number of "risky" lifting situations that you are faced with at your place of work, you may not be able to apply these principles every time. This is why you must always remember to **LIFT IT TWICE!**

The act of lifting is the same as any other movement that you can learn to do better with practice. As you know, the more you practice a skill the better you become at doing it. But preparing to master a skill normally involves mental as well as physical training. Consider bowling, golf, skiing or sharp-shooting. You think carefully about the movements you're going to make before you do them. This is the only way to get them right--at least until they become second nature. Similarly, lifting **TWICE** means applying the principal of planning your movements prior to performing the lift:

1. Your first lift is a mental lift. Think about the lift prior to actually doing it:
 2. How am I going to lift the item? Can I do it myself or should I get some help?
 3. How heavy is the item? Do I need to use mechanical assistance?
 4. Where am I taking the item being lifted? Is the area clear where I need to set it down?
 5. Is it a difficult path or a distance to go?
 6. What hazards may hamper the lift or obstruct the travel path?
 7. Eliminate those hazards before you lift the item. In other words, Plan the Lift First!
 8. The second lift is the actual physical lift. Here is where you carry out your plan.
 9. Use proper body mechanics and techniques while going through the motions. Bend those knees!
 10. Most important: Keep the load as close to your body as possible and don't twist.
- Next time someone tells you to lift twice remember...

