

# Giving Back Strains & Sprains the Slip

Do you know that the most common work injury is also the one you can most easily prevent? Injuries to the lower back affect half the nation's work force at some time during their working lives.

You may think you're in a job that is not prone to back injuries, but take a second look. If your job involves any lifting, you could be at risk. Back injuries usually result from mistakes made in lifting things. The good news is that you can take steps to avoid becoming a statistic—even without the help of special equipment or company programs.

## Can You Really Lift It?

Before you pick up that carton or load, ask yourself these questions:

- Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?
- How high do I have to lift it?
- How far do I have to carry it?
- Will this lifting be a regular part of my job?
- Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

## Lift It Right

If a load weighs more than 25 pounds, follow these recommended steps for lifting it:

- Position your feet properly. One foot goes next to the load and one goes behind it.
- Squat down keeping your head erect and your back straight.
- Grip the load using your full palm. Fingers alone are too weak.

- Draw the load close to your body and keep your elbows and arms near you. Center your body weight over your feet, then start lifting with a thrust of your leg.
- If you must turn, don't twist your body. Point your foot in the direction you're turning.

## Get In Shape

If your job involves lifting, a physical-conditioning program could help you. Your company may offer one or you can get into shape on your own at home.

Stretching exercises are important because they help prevent injuries that come from sudden jerking of muscles that are too tight. Running, swimming, aerobics and weight training all increase strength and stamina.

## If You Do Get Hurt

If you do get that twinge in your back, don't panic. Most back injuries involve a sprain or strain, and the damage is temporary. Here's what you can do to take care of yourself:

- Give your injury time to heal, but don't overrest or you'll get out of condition. If pain persists, see your doctor!
- Go back to work, but avoid lifting until you're ready to resume your full workload.
- Work out a modified work program with your supervisor so that everyone knows you're aiming toward a goal of a full workload again. Then work up from lighter to heavier loads.
- Get into a physical-conditioning program to make sure you don't hurt yourself again. 

