

Millard Refrigerated Services Back Safety (Lifting Techniques) Training Outline - AUGUST

Meeting Objectives

To explain safe lifting techniques and other ways to prevent back strains and injuries. The result should be more awareness of how to lift, sit, stand, and otherwise reduce the potential for back injury, greater use of correct techniques and postures, and a reduction in back strain and injuries.

Suggested Materials to Have on Hand

- Safety Short - Back Safety Video
- List of safe lifting steps
- A box or pallet of product to demonstrate lifting technique and
- Someone to demonstrate correct lifting methods

Introduction/Overview

As you may have learned from personal experience, back injuries can be extremely painful and long-lasting. They can keep you in bed for extended periods of time and they may occasionally even require surgery. For some people, back pain doesn't really ever go away.

Back strains and injuries can happen anywhere. Because of the nature of the work in a cold storage warehouse, we see a certain number of back injuries every year. OSHA has reported that "Back strain due to overexertion represents one of the largest segments of employee injuries in the American workplace. Only the common cold accounts for more lost days of work."

Improper lifting is probably the greatest single cause of back pain and injury, so it's worth taking the time to learn how to do it correctly. We'll also look at how we can sit, stand, sleep, and perform a variety of tasks in ways that won't harm the back.

General Hazards

To understand why there are so many back injuries, it's useful to understand what's in your back to be injured.

Basically, the back holds up your entire body. The spinal column, which runs down your back, is an s-shaped stack of bones called vertebrae. These vertebrae are connected by ligaments and separated by soft discs that cushion and protect the bones. At the center of the spinal column is the spinal cord, and nerves from there run out to other parts of the body.

The back does its job with the help of muscles attached to the vertebrae. These muscles work with the stomach muscles to keep the spinal column in place and keep the back strong.

When you experience back strain or pain, it's usually related to the muscles or ligaments. The pain results from overusing or stretching those muscles or moving them in ways they're not meant to move.

You can injure your back with one wrong move—the kind of thing that can happen shoveling snow—or by a buildup of stress on weak muscles. Other kinds of back injuries include:

- Muscle spasms, which are usually caused by tension or stress
- Strains and sprains, the result of too much exertion of weak muscles, or incorrect lifting
- Slipped discs, which are tears or other damage to the discs between the vertebrae, causing the vertebrae to rub together and irritate or damage the spinal nerves
- Hernias, which are ruptures in the abdominal wall caused by strains from lifting.

There are various tasks and movements, especially lifting, that can lead to back injuries if they're not done properly. ***But probably the biggest hazard to your back is you.*** Among the things that make back injuries much more likely are:

- **Poor physical condition.** The muscles in your back and stomach are holding up your back and letting it move properly. But when those muscles are weak, they can't do their job very well. You know that regular, sensible exercise is important to general health, and it's very important to a healthy back. Exercise helps keep back muscles strong and flexible.
- **Poor posture.** The lower back carries the burden of most of our body weight. Poor posture, while sitting or standing, stresses the back instead of supporting it.
- **Extra weight.** When you're overweight, your back has more to hold up. A potbelly, because of its location, is particularly tough on the back.
- **Stress.** When you feel tense, your muscles, including your back muscles, tense up too.
- **Overdoing.** Too often, people are afraid to say, "That's too heavy for me." Don't make that mistake! You're not going to seem very strong and tough if you're laid up in bed with a back injury that you got lifting things too heavy for you.

So don't overestimate your strength. If you think you'll need help, get it!

Identifying Hazards

The way you live and treat your body has a lot to do with how healthy your back is. But even if your back is in good shape, there are a number of tasks and actions that can create trouble if you don't do them properly, in a way that minimizes strain on your back.

Among the hazards to the back that may be encountered on the job are:

- Heavy lifting

- Twisting and lifting at the same time
- Lifting odd shaped objects (give some examples of product in your warehouse, such as pork bellies, etc.)
- Reaching and lifting objects
- Bending and overexerting
- Lifting items whose weights vary
- Sitting or standing too long in one position.

Protection Against Hazards

The best way to protect your back against the many hazards it faces on the job, and off, is to develop habits that reduce the strain on the back.

- **Break in period.** There is a break in period for new employees. Keep in mind that the body will always ache from lifting for new employees. This is called the break in period and it needs to be distinguished from a true back injury. Sore muscles are to be expected for the first few weeks of work.
- **Slow down.** Back injuries that result from slips, trips, and falls can often be prevented by walking instead of running from place to place. It's also helpful to wear shoes with nonslip soles, and, of course, to look where you're going.
- **Stretch first.** Your back muscles, and the stomach muscles that help them, benefit from stretching before heavy use. It's a good idea to stretch gently before lifting or other back activity. Gentle stretches at the beginning of the day, and periodically during the day, also help keep your back muscles flexible.
- **Rest your back.** When you sleep, your back gets a rest from carrying your body around. To give your back the best rest, sleep on a firm mattress. The best sleep positions for your back are on your side with your knees bent or on your back with your knees elevated.
- **Avoid lifting by using the right equipment.** Whenever possible use material handling equipment—hoists, hand trucks, dollies—rather than your body to lift. And when you transport material on a hand truck, push, don't pull, it.
- **Make planning the first step of lifting.** You can't eliminate all lifting, but you can eliminate some of its hazards if you take the time to plan before you lift.
 - Remove any objects you might trip over.
 - Make sure the area where you'll be lifting is clear of obstacles.
 - Check the object you'll be lifting to see if it has rough or jagged edges or slippery surfaces.
 - Wear gloves that give a good grip on what you're carrying, safety shoes with reinforced toes and nonskid soles, and clothing that fits snugly.
 - Warm up before lifting with gentle bends and stretches.
 - Get additional personnel to help if needed.

Safety Procedures

Keep in mind that your back's major job is to carry your body. When you lift the wrong way, your back has to support you and whatever you're carrying. That's where the trouble starts. **So the object of safe lifting is to protect your back by letting your legs, not your back, do the work.**

Here's how to lift correctly (Show the Safety Short - Back Safety Video and demonstrate how to properly perform lifting functions such as repalletizing product) :

- Stand close to the load with both feet firmly on the floor, about shoulder width apart. Point your toes out.
- Squat down close to the load with your back straight, knees bent, and stomach muscles tight.
- Place your hands on diagonally opposite corners of the load so one hand pulls the load toward you and one lifts.
- Grip the load firmly with both entire hands, not just the fingers.
- Bring the load as close as possible to your body. Keep your weight centered over your feet. Tuck your arms and elbows into your side.
- Stand up slowly, keeping your back straight and letting your legs do the lifting.
- Make sure you have a good grip and can see where you're going.
- Take small steps, keeping the load close to your body - no more than waist high.

Caution: If you have to change direction while you're carrying a load, don't twist. Twisting is a major cause of back injuries. To change direction, move your feet. When you get where you're going, you also have to unload carefully.

Here's how to unload to avoid injury:

- Lower the load slowly, bending your knees so your legs do the work.
- Position your hands so the fingers don't get caught under the load.
- Place the load on the edge of the surface and slide it back.

This technique is the basis of safe lifting. But, since there are so many different situations that make it difficult to use the basic technique, remember this simple rules—

1. **LIFT WITH YOUR LEGS, NOT YOUR BACK**
2. **AVOID BENDING FROM THE WAIST WHILE LIFTING**
3. **KEEP YOUR BACK AS STRAIGHT AS POSSIBLE WHILE WORKING**
4. **NEVER TWIST YOUR BACK WHEN YOU LIFTING OR MOVING PRODUCT. In short – “NEVER TWIST WHEN YOU LIFT”**

Wrap-Up

As we've discussed, your back is incredibly important. It supports your entire body, and you can't afford to damage it. Yet most people experience back pain at some time in their lives, and the back is the most likely part of the body to get injured on the job. Since many back injuries are serious and can leave you with lasting pain, it's very important to do everything you can to prevent them.

Improper lifting is the greatest single source of back injuries, so concentrate on doing it right.