

How to Keep Your Back Safe at Work

If you have experienced back pain before, you are not alone. 80% of the general population will suffer from back pain sometime in their life. Read on for tips on how to keep your back safe while you are on the job.

When Lifting:

Always try to maintain the natural curves in your spine

These curves provide strength and support for your back. This is especially important when lifting or sitting for long periods of time. Lift with your legs, not your back.

Tighten your stomach muscles before you lift

These muscles will help stabilize your spine and prevent injury.

Keep objects close to your body

The further objects are held away from the body, the greater the stress on your lower back. Don't worry about getting your clothes dirty, your back will thank you!

Plan ahead before lifting

Many injuries are the result of poor planning and over-exertion. Test the weight first and decide if you require assistance.

Keep your nose between your toes!

Turn your whole body rather than twisting your spine (especially if you are carrying something heavy).

When Standing:

Establish proper posture

Good posture is nothing more than keeping your body in alignment. Good posture while standing is a straight back, squared shoulders, chin up, chest out, stomach in, feet forward, your hips and knees in a neutral position. Check your posture in a mirror. You should be able to see a straight line from your earlobe through your shoulder, hip, knee, to the middle of your ankle



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Strengthen your posture muscles

Postural muscles include the core, shoulder girdle (including upper and middle back), and pelvis. Core excises include: hovers/planks, side hovers/planks, mountain climbers, back extensions. Shoulder girdle exercises include: rows, pull-ups, and reverse flys. Pelvis exercises include: pelvis tilt, angry cat, and bridges

Stretch daily

Stretching can help to decrease the tightness in postural muscles which can lead to pain. Examples of stretches include: child's pose, chest stretch, hip flexor stretch, and spinal rotation

When Sitting:

Arrange your work area

While you are sitting, make sure the items positioned on your desk are arranged in such a way as to minimize twisting and reaching. These movements put added stress on your back. If you use a keyboard tray, make sure that when the tray is extended you are not leaning forward.

Vary your seated position

Do not sit in the same position for more than 10 minutes at a time. This will place constant stress on the same tissues in your body. Cross your legs, put your feet up or sit up tall. Just don't stay in one position for too long.

Get out of your chair!

A recently proposed guideline suggests a sitting limit of 50 minutes before getting up and moving around. Use this as an opportunity to walk to the bathroom, the printer or to get a drink. While you are up you can do neck rolls and arm circles to relieve neck and shoulder discomfort. It is also a good idea to raise your arms over your head and push your hands toward the ceiling to get in a good stretch.