

Material Handling - Back Injury Prevention

Back injuries can develop gradually as a result of repeated micro-trauma brought on by strenuous activity over time. Acute and immediate back injuries are also prevalent in labor occupations that require heavy lifting. Traumatic back injuries often have lasting, chronic symptoms that leave workers with some level of pain and an overall degraded quality of life, regardless of the amount of medical treatment received. Back disorders are one of the leading causes of disability for people in their working years and afflict over 600,000 employees each year, costing companies approximately \$50 billion annually. Worker ages have increased in recent years, broadening the scope of workers who are susceptible to musculoskeletal injuries. Manual material handling is the principal source of compensable injuries in the U.S. workforce, and four out of five of these injuries affect the back of the worker.

There are several factors associated with back disorders. They are a direct result of exceeding the capability of muscles, tendons, or discs. Several poor body mechanics can result in back disorders, such as reaching while lifting, poor posture (sitting or standing), repetitive lifting with poor form, twisting while lifting, poor footing or constrained postures, and working within a poorly design workstation. Fatigue, frequent bent posture work, worker fitness and body composition can also contribute to back disorders and injuries.

Some signs and symptoms of back injuries include but are not limited to, pain when attempting to assume normal postures, decreased mobility such as bending, and pain when standing or rising from seated positions. Difficulty or pain doing normal tasks such as putting on

shoes or picking something off of the ground can also be a sign of a back disorder.

Employers can help minimize these disabling and costly injuries. Conduct walkarounds and ask employees about their opinion on the difficulty of manual material handling as well as their personal experiences with back pain. Observe workers and their lifting postures and make note if poor lifting techniques are being used regularly. Determine frequency and duration of common lifting tasks in the workplace. Evaluate repetitive material handling tasks and ways to alleviate potential injuries. For example, some lifting tasks may be made safer by ensuring two-handed lifts are used, or material is stored at a slightly higher level by using a platform to decrease the lifting range of motion. Additional variables to consider are floor traction, the distance which objects must be carried, and control of unusually shaped objects.

Train workers on the general principals of ergonomics associated with their tasks and how to recognize lifting hazards. Workers should report injuries as soon as they occur so that hazards can be associated with certain tasks in the workplace, and other workers can be protected from a similar injury. Implement job rotations for employees who are subject to manual material handling and provide regular breaks to prevent over-fatigue of muscle groups. Mandate two-person lifting for objects over a certain weight and train each person on how to properly lift from the knees and not bending at the waist. For workers who are in positions for long periods, provide the ability to rotate standing or sitting, and ensure workstations and chairs are adjusted for proper ergonomics.

Additional Topics: _____

Notes: _____

Meeting Date: _____
Conducted By: _____

Attended By: **PRINT** **SIGN**

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