

# Propel HR NEWSLETTER

SAFETY

September 2001

## Be Good To Your Back

Eight out of ten adults will have a lower back problem at some time in their life. And most will have more than one occurrence of low back problems. In dealing with back pain, prevention is the name of the game and is best managed through proper lifting and bending techniques as well as remaining active and physically fit.

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### For Employers

- Early identification of potential injuries has proved to be an excellent way of reducing long-term and chronic problems.
- For employees who miss work time due to back problems, the average time away from the job is between 6 and 7 days.
- If the employee is impaired, the employer is obligated to attempt adjustments. Thirty to 40 percent of the cases can be handled by making minor job adjustments. Twenty-five percent to 30 percent of the impaired employees need time off to recuperate and then can return to their job without adjustments.

### BACK STATISTICS

- There is no known cause for up to **85%** of low back pain
- About **two-thirds** of all back pain develops gradually “without any trauma or precipitating event”
- **90%** recover within six weeks, with or without treatment, and regardless of the type of treatment
- **90%** of those who hurt themselves a second time never return to work
- **75%** of people recover from acute low back pain within two weeks
- If their jobs permit it, most people continue to work through their back pain. The annual rate of low back disability in the United States is only about 2%, but the annual rate of low back pain symptoms is **50 percent!**

## Safe Work Techniques

1. **Catching Objects and Working Low.** Keep your feet firmly planted on the ground, with your back straight and your knees slightly bent. Your legs should absorb the impact, not your back. Keep your back as straight as possible.
2. **Extended Sitting/Standing.** Certain jobs require long hours of standing or sitting. Get up and stretch frequently. If standing, ease the strain on your lower back by changing foot positions often. Keep your weight evenly balanced, don't lean to one side.
3. **Other Materials Handling Tasks.** Tasks that require lowering, pushing, pulling, and carrying can create back problems. If the task feels uncomfortable or unnatural, try and use equipment such as carts, forklifts, dollies, hoists or ask for help before handling it alone.
4. **Housekeeping.** Slippery floors, crowded work conditions, tools, or other hazards on the floor can create slip, trip, or fall hazards that can result in back injury.
5. **Poor Posture at Work.** Be aware of posture when sitting, standing, or reclining. FYI-Sleeping on your stomach can lead to morning backache.
6. **Poor Lighting.** Poor lighting can lead to poor work practices that result in injuries of many types. Make sure lighting is adequate for the task at hand.

### Safe Lifting Techniques

- ◆ Size up the load before you lift; test by lifting corners or by pushing
- ◆ Bend the knees!
- ◆ Center yourself over the load
- ◆ Get a good hand hold
- ◆ Lift straight up; let your legs do the work
- ◆ Avoid overreaching or stretching
- ◆ Don't twist or turn your body
- ◆ Make sure beforehand you have a clear path to carry the load
- ◆ Set the load down properly
- ◆ Always push, not pull
- ◆ Get help if the load is too long, heavy, etc.

## BAD BACK RISK FACTORS

1. **Increasing Age:** Loss of ability to flex and bend the spine. However, the greatest number of injuries are sustained by workers between the ages of 25 and 44.
2. **Prior episode:** After one episode, you are 4 times more likely to have additional occurrences down the road.
3. **Time of day:** Your back is more vulnerable during the early morning hours. The probability of sprain and strain disorders is greatest between 6 and 11 am.
4. **Genetics:** Back pain tends to run in families. Genetics has been proven to be a much more important factor in disc degeneration than type of work or physical activity.
5. **Obesity:** There is an increase in back pain prevalence with increasing obesity.
6. **Smoking:** The risk of low back pain increases steadily with cumulative exposure and with the degree of maximal daily exposure to smoke.
7. **Gender:** About two-thirds of employees who suffer back injuries are male.
8. **Industry:** Service sector (116,000), manufacturing (89,000), and retail trade (71,000) reported the most back injuries in 1999.

**Remember:** Prevention is best managed through proper lifting and bending techniques, the use of commercially available support belts and the maintenance of proper posture. Active, aerobically fit individuals have fewer back injuries, miss fewer work days, and report fewer back symptoms.

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 If you have any questions concerning back injuries please contact **Propel HR** at (864) 271-7611 or (800) 446-6567. **Propel HR** will also be happy to implement a back safety program or continue back safety training.