

WHAT CAUSES BACK INJURIES?

Most back injuries are the result of lifting, pushing, and pulling over a long period. The working conditions that cause back injuries are called risk factors. The main risk factors for back injuries in health care are:

- **Force**, the effort it takes to lift, move, or reposition a patient or object.
- **Repetition**, how often a movement must be performed.
- **Awkward positions**, lifting or doing other tasks while the body is in a twisted, bent, stooped or other position that puts a strain on muscles and joints.

Lower Back Pain and Injuries: Back injuries are one of the leading causes of work- related injuries. Back pain may appear suddenly, but is often the result of numerous micro-injuries to the back. Improper posture during manual material handling, poorly designed workstations, and repetitive tasks can all lead to low back pain and injuries. Risks to the lower back can be reduced by exercising, automation of material handling tasks, and redesign of workstations.

Low back pain is a very common complaint for a simple reason. Since the lumbar spine is connected to your pelvis, this is where most of your weight bearing and body movement takes place. Typically, this is where people tend to place too much pressure, such as: lifting up a heavy box, twisting to move a heavy load, or carrying a heavy object. Such repetitive injuries can lead to damage to the parts of the lumbar spine.

Exercise is vital to recovery and to maintaining a healthy spine. Consider it part of long-term health management and risk reduction. Regular exercise is the most basic way to combat back problems. However, if you already have an injury or damage to the spine, talk to your doctor or physical therapist before you start an exercise routine. You need to make sure the exercises you choose are effective and safe for your particular case.

Why exercise? Scientific studies have shown that people who exercise regularly have far fewer problems with their back. It helps strengthen the muscles in your back that correspond with your spine. It can reduce your risk of falls and injuries. It can strengthen your abdomen (your belly), arms, and legs, which reduces back strain. Stretching reduces risk of muscle spasms. In addition, weight bearing exercises help prevent loss of bone mass caused by osteoporosis, reducing your risk of compression fractures. Aerobic exercise, the type that gets your heart pumping and pulse rate up, has been shown to be a good pain reliever as well. The natural chemicals of the body that combat pain - called endorphins - are released during exercise and actually reduce your pain.

Q Do back belts prevent injuries?

A There is inadequate scientific evidence that back belts actually reduce the risk of back injury, according to a report released by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In fact, if you read the packaging on some of the belts, it warns that they do not prevent back injuries. There is a tendency for individuals to think that if they are wearing a belt, and just pull it in nice and tight, that they are safe no matter what. But you can still injure your back if you are performing an unsafe lift, belt or no belt. So, if you do wear a back belt, use it in conjunction with safe lifting techniques and some common sense!