

# Back Safety is for Everyone

We often think of back safety as only being important for people in heavy physical jobs. The fact is that back safety is important for all of us and not just at work, but at home and at play as well.

Instead of from a single injury, back problems often arise over time. This can be avoided by keeping your back healthy. Maintaining a healthy back involves good posture, proper lifting techniques, overall good health, and stress reduction.

## Good Posture

The natural form of the spine consists of 3 curves. These are the cervical (neck), the thoracic (mid-back), and the lumbar (low back). Maintaining these 3 curves while sitting, moving, and lifting allows your muscles to provide the best possible support and strength for your back. Good posture doesn't mean staying in one position all day, though. Your body is made to be in motion. Change position often to relieve muscle tension

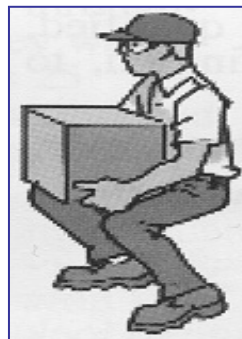


## Proper Lifting

Think about the lift!

Is it safe for you to lift or should you get help? Should equipment be used? Can the load be made smaller? Once you have it lifted is there a clear path to where you are going? After you have considered the lift use the following proper lifting techniques.

- Stand close to the load with your feet wide apart.
- Squat down, bending at the hips and knees.
- Grip and hold the object firmly, keeping it as close to your body as possible.
- Use your legs, buttock and stomach muscles to lift while keeping the back in its natural position.
- Lift smoothly rather than jerking.
- Use your feet to turn instead of twisting your body.
- Try to avoid moving heavy objects long distances. Use a cart or handtruck.
- Set the object down using the same technique as picking it up.



Proper lifting is important for smaller lifts as well. At workstations keep things as close as possible to avoid reaching out to lift them to you. At workbenches keep tools close and use a vise or clamp to hold things while you work on them.

## Good Health

Regular exercise and a proper diet help to maintain muscle strength and flexibility as well as helping to keep your weight under control. The increased blood flow from exercise helps keep back muscles and disks healthy. Keeping your weight down means your muscles don't have to work as hard. Remember that your muscles have to lift the weight you're picking up as well as the weight of your body.



## Stress Reduction

Be aware of the effect tension has on your muscles. Take regular breaks when working in one position for long periods and try stretching to reduce built-up muscle tension. When driving long distances change positions often and stop for regular breaks.

## Remember

- Keep the load close to your body.
- Maintain the 3 natural curves of your back.
- Use your leg muscles instead of your back muscles.
- Turn your body with your feet instead of twisting.
- Ask for assistance or use equipment for heavy or awkward objects.
- Change positions often.
- Take breaks and stretch.
- Stay healthy.

**A note on back belts.** Although popular, there is no scientific evidence that they prevent injury. Studies show no significant difference in injury rates between people who use them and those who don't. Good health and proper lifting are your best protection.

**Questions?** Call Bruce Boyer at X2947 or e-mail at [bruce.boyer@wwu.edu](mailto:bruce.boyer@wwu.edu)

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