

Educate your employees on maintaining a healthy back

Follow these steps when educating your employees about maintaining a healthy back.

1. Conduct training regularly. Knowledge is power for all employees. Be sure to educate new employees too so they are up to speed right from the start.
2. Explain the company's commitment to back injury prevention. If your employees understand the company's commitment to preventing back injuries, they will be more likely to take it seriously. You should also explain what their responsibilities will be in a back injury program.
3. Describe the types of hazards found during your workplace analysis. Employees will have a higher degree of confidence in your loss prevention efforts by knowing the company has evaluated the workplace and asked for employees' feedback. Tell them how the company plans to eliminate or reduce the risks.
4. Consider stretching at work as a way to prevent back injury. SFM has a "Stretching works @ work" poster to help guide your employees in daily stretches. Download or order it today through SFM's "Resource catalog" at www.sfmic.com.
5. Train specifically on the four points of safe lifting. Distribute the "Employee's guide: Four points to safe lifting" and "Back safety quiz" to your employees. Use the sheet as a tool for training. Employees can follow along and can take the quiz for fun after training to test their "back safety" knowledge.

The four points of safe lifting are:

1. Keep your head up.
 2. Keep a neutral curve in your back.
 3. Bring the load in close.
 4. Lift with your legs.
6. Educate employees on additional back safety topics. Depending on your industry and your needs, here are a few additional back safety training topics:
- Stretching and body mechanics.
 - Proper use of material handling equipment.
 - Procedures to follow if you suffer a back injury.
 - Healthy lifestyle practices and the importance of physical fitness.



Supervisor strategies

Consider these strategies to reduce lifting hazards in your workplace

It's important to look at lifting hazards in all aspects of work. Here are some strategies that have helped many businesses reduce the incidence of back injuries.

Material handling

- Pay attention to the obvious details like the size and weight of material, but also look at the less obvious factors like packaging and convenience for handling.
- Ship directly from the supplier to the consumer whenever possible.

Material flow

- Eliminate unnecessary material handling by combining operations or shortening the distance the materials must be moved.
- Watch for crossing paths, loops, backtracking and general lack of direction. Reduce carrying distance.

The job

- Be aware of the trade-off between frequency of lift and weight. Frequency challenges endurance, and weight challenges strength.
- Do not rush employees beyond their physical capabilities.
- Minimize reach requirements. Design the operation for the smallest employee.
- Simplify tasks by combining operations and steps.

The load

- Plan for incoming materials to arrive in suitable containers so parts do not require unloading.
- Keep manually handled loads as small as possible and keep load height less than 30 inches to avoid viewing obstruction.
- Ensure that loads are easy to grip by providing handles, cutouts, straps or textured containers.

Workplace and workspace

- Practice good housekeeping.
- Try to optimize lifting postures by storing materials between knuckle height with your arms at your sides and shoulder height.
- Provide adjustable chairs and work surfaces whenever possible to accommodate employees.

Worker

- Rotate employees who do a lot of material handling to less strenuous jobs.
- Split work among two or more employees.
- Institute appropriate work and rest schedules.
- Consider implementing a workplace stretching program to help keep your employees flexible and injury-free.

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