

Proper Lifting Techniques

Safe lifting is as easy as one, two, three. The secret to safe lifting is to:

1. **Assume the safe lifting position.** Stand close to the object and keep a wide stance. Keep feet turned out and heels down. Then squat by bending at the hips and knees. Ears, shoulders, and hips should form a nearly straight, vertical line.
2. **Prepare to lift.** Pull the load close to the body (this reduces pressure on the back) and grasp the object firmly. Tighten stomach muscles.
3. **Let your legs do the lifting.** Maintain the natural curves of the spine and rise up from the squatting position using the legs to power the lift. Don't bend over at the neck, shoulders, or waist while lifting.

When it's time to unload, face the chosen spot and lower the load slowly—again by using the legs, not the back. Simply bend the knees and lower the body with the load, keeping the back comfortably straight.

All lifts are not created equal. Teach your employees these techniques for special lifting situations.

1. **Reaching overhead**—Use a step stool or ladder. Slide the load close to the body. Then let the legs and arms do all the work.
2. **Oversized or heavy loads**—Use a two-person lift. Work as a team. Designate one person to direct the lift. Lift at the same time. Keep the load level when carrying and move smoothly together. Unload at the same time.
3. **Long objects**—Carry lumber, pipe, and other long objects over the shoulder, being careful the ends don't hit anyone or anything.
4. **Bags and sacks**—Assume the safe lifting position. Grasp the load at opposite top and bottom corners. Power the body up with the legs and use the arms to raise the load to rest on the hip. Fully stand, and move the load to rest on the shoulder.

Why It Matters...

- Nearly 1,000 American workers injure their backs on the job every day.
- The majority of these injuries occur while an employee is lifting, carrying, or unloading materials.
- Once injured, backs are more susceptible to reinjury.
- Back injuries contribute significantly to lost workdays and lost productivity.
- A significant percentage of compensation claims involve back injuries, costing U.S. businesses billions of dollars a year.



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Don't forget to reinforce safe behavior and to correct unsafe behavior.

To paraphrase an old saying, you can teach employees how to lift safely, but you can't *make* them lift safely—without regular reinforcement, that is. When you see an employee lifting safely, take a moment to provide some positive feedback. Say something like, "Good to see you practicing those safe lifting techniques we talked about. Keep up the good work!" And when you see an employee lifting incorrectly, be sure to stop and correct the unsafe behavior on the spot. Say something like, "I'm concerned you're going to hurt your back if you keep lifting that way. If you bend your knees like this [you demonstrate] and lift with your legs, you're going to save your back. Go ahead. Try it. I'm sure you'll see the difference."