

YCPARMIA Safety Journal

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Back Safety FAQs

How to take good care of your back

Preventing a back injury is much easier than repairing one. Because your back is critically important to your ability to walk, sit, and work, it's essential to take good care of it. Here are some frequently asked questions and answers about back safety that can help you avoid a painful injury.

Q: What causes back problems?

A: A number of things:

- ☉ **Poor physical condition.** If your back muscles are weak or if you've put on a few pounds, your back must work harder. Making your back work harder can lead to back pain.
- ☉ **Poor posture.** Standing, sitting, or lying incorrectly will put strain on your spine. Your spine is designed to operate best in its natural "S" shape.
- ☉ **Aging.** As we age, the muscles in our backs lose their strength and ability to function.
- ☉ **Tension and stress.** Tight and knotted muscles, which are caused by tension and stress, can cause muscle spasms and back pain.

Q: What can I do to keep my back healthy?

A: You can:

- ☉ **Exercise** to strengthen your back and reduce stress. Having strong back and stomach muscles is important in order to ease the work your back is put through each day.
- ☉ **Lose excess weight.** Excess weight exerts extra force on back and stomach muscles. By losing weight, you can reduce strain and pain in your back.
- ☉ **Maintain good posture.** You can prevent many back injuries by learning to sit and stand correctly. The best way to sit is straight, with your back against the back of the chair. Keep your feet flat on the floor and your knees slightly higher than your hips. Stand tall with your head up and shoulders back.
- ☉ **Lift correctly.** For proper lifting procedure, see the sidebar on the side of this page.

Q: When carrying a load, is it OK to turn or twist my back as long as I turn my torso?

A: No. Minimize any turning or twisting. If you must turn while carrying a load, turn by walking around with your feet; don't twist your back.

SAFE LIFTING

One of the best ways to protect your back on the job and avoid other lifting-related injuries is to use proper lifting techniques. Before lifting, think about the job. Examine the object for sharp corners, slippery spots, or other potential hazards. Know your lifting limit and don't try to exceed it.

Ask for help or divide the load, if possible, to make each lift lighter. Also know where you're going to set the item down, and make sure your path is free of obstructions that could cause you to trip and fall.

When you're ready to lift, take these steps:

1. Stand close to the load with your feet spread about shoulder width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other for balance.
2. Squat down, bending at the knees (not your waist). Tuck your chin while keeping your back as vertical as possible.
3. Get a firm grasp on the object before beginning the lift.
4. Slowly begin lifting with your legs by straightening them. Never twist your body during this step.
5. Once the lift is complete, keep the object as close to your body as possible. As the load's center of gravity moves away from the body, there's a dramatic increase in stress to the lower back.

Don't forget to set the load down correctly, too. Squat and let your legs take the weight as you place the object down. Also remember to keep your fingers out of the way!

New Equipment?

10 safety issues you need to know

As technology advances, we often have to bring in new equipment to keep our operations efficient and up to date. That means you have to learn how to handle new machines and tools.

Here are 10 essential items of information you need to know to protect yourself:

- 1. Possible hazards.** Are there any new hazards to be aware of?
- 2. Special safety features.** What safety features does the equipment have?
- 3. Required personal protective equipment.** What kind of PPE do I need?
- 4. Proper start-up procedures.** How do I start the equipment safely?
- 5. Safe operating procedures.** What steps do I take when I operate it to prevent accidents and injuries?
- 6. Correct feeding or loading procedures.** Do I need to learn any special procedures?
- 7. Normal shutdown procedures.** How do I shut down the equipment safely?
- 8. Emergency shutdown procedures.** In an emergency, what should I do?
- 9. Recommended maintenance procedures and schedules.** What maintenance does the manufacturer recommend, and who is responsible for performing it?
- 10. Problems to watch out for.** How will I know if there's a safety or mechanical problem?

Simple and Safe

Take precautions against job hazards

Protect yourself from hazards by taking the proper precautions. For example:

SAFETY HAZARD	PRECAUTION
The possibility of part of your body getting caught in a machine	Check to make sure that all machine guards are in place and operating properly <i>every time</i> before you start up the machine.
The chance that you could get splashed in the eye while handling chemicals	Wear goggles whenever you handle hazardous materials that could splash.
The danger of being injured if a co-worker starts up a machine while you're servicing or repairing it	Always lock and tag out a machine before you do any maintenance or repair work.
The possibility that someone could slip or trip	Practice good housekeeping. Keep the area around your workstation clear. Pick up any objects you see lying on the floor (anywhere), and clean up spills or report them to maintenance.

WATCH OUT FOR HAZARDOUS HARRY

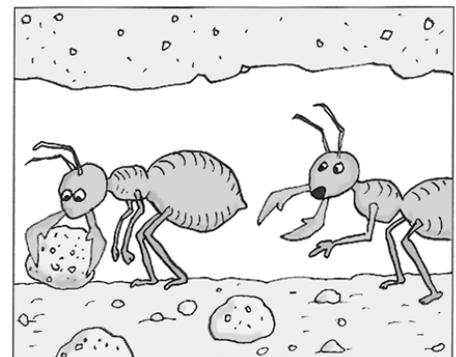
Every workplace has a Hazardous Harry. Harry says things like:

- ☹ "It won't happen to me."
- ☹ "Accidents? What can you do? It's just the luck of the draw."
- ☹ "Real men (women) don't need PPE. That stuff is for wimps."
- ☹ "Safety rules? I make my own rules."
- ☹ "Let me show you a shortcut."
- ☹ "That machine guard is just slowing us down. Let's take it off."

Harry (or Harriet) is an accident waiting to happen. Or more likely he's already caused numerous accidents and been responsible for getting more than one co-worker injured.

Harry is bad news. You want to watch out around him. But if you really want to help him — and make your work area safer — you'll get together with your other safety-minded co-workers and have a little talk with Harry.

Tell him you're worried about his safety — and your own. Convince him it's time to start taking safety seriously. If that doesn't work, maybe you'll need to involve your supervisor. No one has the right to carelessly endanger his or her co-workers.



"Remember - lift with your mandibles, not your thorax."

Sleepy Safety

Lack of sleep can be a safety hazard

Warning Signs of Fatigue

- Are you feeling sluggish and/or irritable?
- Are you having trouble concentrating and/or are your reactions slow?
- Do you have trouble remembering things?
- Are you having trouble keeping your eyes open?
- Do you actually doze off for a few seconds?

YES NO

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Take Responsibility for Safety

- Do you tell your supervisor when you're tired enough to be a hazard?
- When fatigue could affect your safety performance, do you do tasks that require minimal alertness and don't pose a safety risk?
- Do you avoid driving or using machinery when you feel tired?
- Do you have a nearby co-worker to back you up when you feel tired?

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When Sleep Problems Persist

- Do you talk to your doctor?
- Do you get a checkup to find out if there is a physical cause?
- Do you get help with ongoing stress or worry that is depriving you of needed sleep?
- Do you inform your supervisor of your sleep problem and keep him or her updated on your progress?

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Pick up a Few Pounds?

Now's the time to take them off

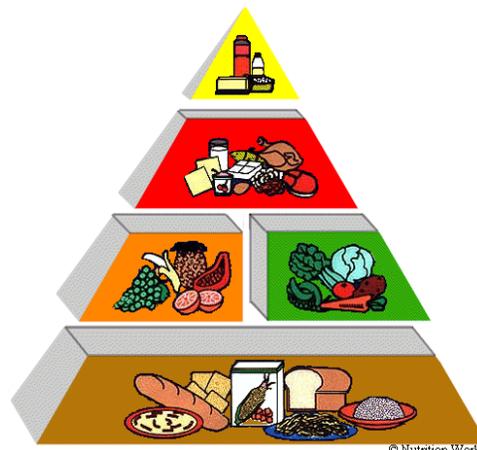
The third week in January is **Healthy Weight Week**. If you went overboard over the holidays and put on a few extra pounds, now's the time to take them back off.

According to Dr. Rena Wing, co-developer of the National Weight Control Registry, people who are most successful losing weight and keeping it off have four things in common:

1. **They eat a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet.**
2. **They weigh themselves frequently to monitor their weight.**
3. **They're physically active**
4. **They eat a good breakfast every morning.**

The last point might surprise some dieters, who think that by skipping breakfast they can cut back on calories. But this strategy often backfires, Wing says. People who eat little or no breakfast and a light lunch tend to get hungry later and end up consuming most of their calories late in the day when it's harder to burn them off. Often, too, those calories are high in fat and sugar.

Wing says successful weight losers change this pattern. They also maintain their low-calorie, low-fat diet (no more than 24 percent of calories from fat) and work plenty of physical activity into their routines.



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Back Safety Quiz

What you don't know can hurt you

Find out how much you know about back safety by taking this quiz:

1. Poor _____ can cause back pain by disrupting the back's natural curves.
2. Name two things to check before attempting to lift a load:

3. Lifting with your legs is necessary only when attempting to lift heavy loads.
 True or False
4. Back injuries are usually the result of a single traumatic event.
 True or False
5. Is your back more suited for pushing or pulling a load?

Answers:

- (1) Poor posture disrupts the back's natural curves.
- (2) Size up or evaluate the load and clear the pathway.
- (3) False. Lifting incorrectly, even with light loads, constitutes back abuse.
- (4) False. Back injuries are usually the result of years of abuse until the weakened back gives way.
- (5) The back has more strength pushing than it does when pulling.

Be Aware, Be Safe

Do your part to make the workplace safe

Many accidents happen because people are not aware of hazards, not paying attention while they work, or not thinking that safety is important in their job. The company can provide safety training, safety programs and rules, and personal protective equipment, but all this can't protect you if you don't look out for yourself.

Being aware of safety means always having the right information to do the job safely—and asking if you don't know. It also means taking the time before you start working to identify potential hazards and take the proper precautions to protect yourself. And it means following safety procedures and focusing your full attention on the job the whole time you're working.

One of your most important safety responsibilities is simply to be aware of the need for taking proper safety precautions. Here's what to do:

- ⇒ Take the time to look for and identify hazards—and do something about them. Never assume that someone else will take care of it.
- ⇒ Examine the substances, equipment, and situations that are part of the job.
- ⇒ Look for unsafe acts as well as unsafe conditions.
- ⇒ Be alert to anything that simply doesn't look, smell, or "feel" right.



'TIS THE SEASON FOR SNEEZIN'

Here are five common myths about colds and flus along with the facts according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

Myth: Take antibiotics.

Fact: Antibiotics don't work at all against viruses. And they only fight existing bacterial infections. They won't prevent infection, so they're not effective "just in case."

Myth: Starve a cold and feed a fever (flu).

Fact: There's no evidence this'll reduce the symptoms or duration of colds or flu. But the body always needs adequate nutrition and fluids, especially during the stress of a cold or flu.

Myth: Vaccines prevent colds.

Fact: Vaccines only work against the specific type of flu virus for which they're developed. There is no effective universal vaccine against cold viruses.

Myth: Take Vitamin C and herbal formulas to prevent or stop colds.

Fact: A variety of vitamin and herbal remedies, such as Vitamin C, Echinacea, and zinc, have been tested and have shown encouraging results for reducing some cold symptoms, but no conclusive results for preventing or stopping colds.

Myth: Bundle up or you'll catch a cold.

Fact: There is no evidence you can get a cold from exposure to cold weather or from getting chilled or overheated.