

Lifting Safely

If you use safe lifting practices, you can reduce your risk of injury and be safer at work.

Tips for safe lifting

Plan before you lift. Keep the area clean and free of clutter. Eliminate obstructions that prevent the object from being lifted properly.

Get help for heavy or bulky loads. Use equipment like a cart to help when possible.

Warm up your muscles with gentle stretches before you lift. This is very important if you have been sitting for long periods of time. Take more time to warm up your muscles when it is cold.

Test the weight of the load first. Be sure that you can handle it safely. A big load of the same weight will put more strain on your body than a small load. Break your load into smaller or lighter loads.

Lift with as straight a back as is comfortable. Avoid 'rounding' the lower back. Lifting with a 'rounded' back greatly increases the risk of injury. Bend your legs so they do the lifting.

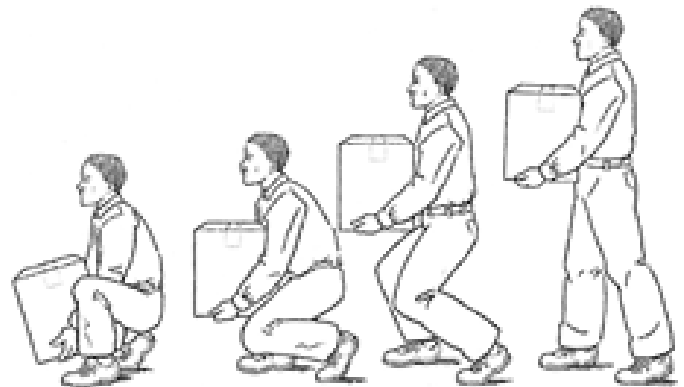
Hold the load close to your body. Keep the arms and elbows close to the sides of your body. Also, grip the load using your whole hand not just the fingers. Using your whole hand will give you the greatest grip area and strength. Balance the load evenly between both arms.

Keep the load between shoulder and knee height. Reaching to lift a load can increase strain on the back by 10 times the actual weight.

Plan where to set the load down. Avoid placing loads directly on the floor. Can loads be placed on a raised platform or cart?

Rest your muscles. You need time to recover your strength between lifts to be able to work safely. Repeated and long lifts are the most tiring. Change your position, stretch to relax and rest tired muscles or rotate between lifting and non-lifting tasks. Switch between heavy loads and lighter ones.

Rest more often when it is hot and humid. Take more breaks if you are also using tools or equipment that vibrate.



It is important to

- Face the way you need to move - no twisting
- Lift with as straight a back as is comfortable.
- Hold the load close to the center of your body.
- Avoid quick or rapid motions - lift smoothly

How much can I lift safely?

There is no single safe weight for lifting. The answer depends on many factors:

- size and shape of the load
- grip on the load
- distance between you and the load
- distance and the direction that you lift the load
- how often and how much time you spend lifting
- how often and how long are your breaks
- floor surface - rough or low friction
- your age, fitness level, health problems and previous injuries
- the weight of the load is one of the factors
- the body position when lifting, moving and setting down the load.
- The speed of movement - faster motions are harder on the body
- Time pressure and other psychosocial issues

An ergonomic assessment using valid assessment methods can identify tasks that have a low, moderate or high risk of injury.

Further information on these assessment methods and case studies can be found on our website.

Did you know that lifting is the most common cause of low back pain at work?

Three out of every four Canadians have back pain at some time if their job includes lifting.

The employer's responsibility

The Workplace Safety and Health Act of Manitoba requires that the employer ensure the safety, health, and welfare of all the workers in a way that is reasonable practical. The Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Regulation: Part 8 states that a risk assessment must be conducted when a risk of injury is brought to the attention of the employer. This should be done in cooperation with the health and safety committee or worker representative. Employers can:

- provide adjustable tables or platforms for lifting at waist height.
- provide mechanical aids, for example, dolly, hoist, forklift.
- encourage workers to get help to move bulky and heavy loads or to make smaller loads.
- schedule additional rest breaks for workers to relax tired muscles when lifting.
- teach and regularly review safe lifting methods
- reduce the weight by decreasing its size, amount of material or container size.
- Redesign the workstation to bring the object closer or to waist level.
- Provide handles or hand holes to ease gripping.
- Improve visual line of sight and or lighting to avoid glare or shadows.

What can you do?

You can ask your joint health and safety committee or worker representative to review lifting tasks at your workplace. An ergonomic assessment can identify and assess the risk in any lifting, lowering, pushing pulling or carrying situation.

For more information

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