

Safetyline

Apartment Association of Michigan

SAFETY AT A GLANCE

Membership in the Apartment Association carries benefits beyond savings on Work Comp insurance. Members join a network of their peers; thus, gaining access to information sharing and the tools needed for effective loss control.

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Take The Strain Out Of Preventing 'Manual Material Handling' Injuries

Editor's Note: We encourage all of our members to use this information as a starting point for effective safety communication. Members should add to it based on their safety needs and work environments.

While strains, sprains and sore backs are some of the most commonly reported injuries in the workplace, they are, with a little safety reorientation, easily preventable.

In the broadest sense, strains, sprains and back injuries are from overuse or misuse.

Any of the above can be the result of a single episode, such as a fall, a sudden twist or repeated overuse. In the latter, small amounts of body stress accumulate slowly but steadily. The result can be damage and pain.

The areas of your body that are most vulnerable to sprains are your ankles, knees and wrist. A sprained ankle can occur when your foot turns inward. This can put extreme tension on the ligaments of your outer ankle and cause a sprain. A sprained knee can be the result of a sudden twist. Wrist sprains most often occur when you fall on an outstretched hand.

A strain is the result of an

injury to either a muscle or a tendon, usually in your foot or leg. The strain may be a simple stretch in your muscle or tendon, or it may be a partial or complete tear in the muscle-and-tendon combination.

The number one cause of back injuries is from improper lifting. Second to this is improper carrying and twisting of the torso. In the parlance of the industry these are called, "manual material handling" issues.

Good technique here is critical. Your back is a lever. It works on a 10-to-1 ratio. So if you are lifting 10 pounds, your back is feeling 100 pounds. If you are lifting 50 pounds, your back is feeling 500 pounds.

That's the way your body is built; that's the way it works, and if you don't use good technique 500 pounds on your lower back is going to cause big problems. This might not surface today, maybe not tomorrow but at some time this will become a problem for the employer and the employee." Recommendations:

- Don't look to lifting belts to take the place of good lifting and handling techniques. While useful, these belts are

at best "band-aids" for a larger issue. (Incidentally, these belts are to be worn only while lifting and handling materials. They are not meant to be worn throughout the workday.)

- Reduce the weight of the object. Use 40 or 50 pound bags of salt instead of 80-pound bags. An 80-pound bag is just too heavy and unwieldy for the average maintenance worker to manage.

- Eliminate unnecessary lifting or carrying.

- If possible, use mechanical devices for lifting. Consider renting such devices, as the per-diem price is often quite reasonable.

All of us at CMI and Smith-Peabody-Stiles support efforts to make the workplace a safer and more productive place. For concerns and questions contact Brenda Boomer or Jim Peabody at Smith-Peabody-Stiles, 1-800-467-6645. Gary Smith, loss control representative with Citizens Management, will work with properties and management companies to establish viable safety programs and to fine tune existing plans. Contact him at: 517-540-4132.

See inside for more tips on preventing strains, sprains and injuries.

BACK DISORDERS AND INJURIES

GENERAL. Back disorders can develop gradually as a result of microtrauma brought about by repetitive activity over time or can be the product of a single traumatic event. Because of the slow and progressive onset of this internal injury, the condition is often ignored until the symptoms become acute, often resulting in disabling injury. Acute back injuries can be the immediate result of improper lifting techniques and/or lifting loads that are too heavy for the back to support. While the acute injury may seem to be caused by a single well-defined incident, the real cause is often a combined interaction of the observed stressor coupled with years of weakening of the musculoskeletal support mechanism by repetitive micro-trauma. Injuries can arise in muscle, ligament, vertebrae, and discs, either singly or in combination.

INCIDENCE. Although back injuries account for no work-related deaths, they do account for a significant amount of human suffering, loss of productivity, and economic burden on compensation systems. Back disorders are one of the leading causes of disability for people in their working years and afflict over 600,000 employees each year with a cost of about \$50 billion annually say most recent reports. The frequency and economic impact of back injuries and disorders on the work force are expected to increase over the next several decades as the average age of the work force increases and medical costs go up.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH BACK DISORDERS. Back disorders result from exceeding the capability of the muscles, tendons, discs, or the cumulative effect of several contributors:

- a. Reaching while lifting.
- b. Poor posture--how one sits or stands.
- c. Stressful living and working activities--staying in one position for too long.
- d. Bad body mechanics--how one lifts, pushes, pulls, or carries objects.
- e. Poor physical condition--losing the strength and endurance to perform physical tasks without strain.
- f. Poor design of job or work station.
- g. Repetitive lifting of awkward items, equipment, or (in health-care facilities) patients.
- h. Twisting while lifting.
- i. Bending while lifting.
- j. Maintaining bent postures.

- k. Heavy lifting.
- l. Fatigue.
- m. Poor footing such as slippery floors, or constrained posture.
- n. Lifting with forceful movement.
- o. Vibration, such as with lift truck drivers, delivery drivers, etc.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS. Signs and symptoms include pain when attempting to assume normal posture, decreased mobility, and pain when standing or rising from a seated position.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL/ENGINEERING CONTROLS.

General. Alter the task to eliminate the hazardous motion and/or change the position of the object in relation to the employee's body, such as adjusting the height of a pallet or shelf.

MANUAL HANDLING TASKS.

- a. Material handling tasks should be designed to minimize the weight, range of motion, and frequency of the activity.
- b. Work methods and stations should be designed to minimize the distance between the person and the object being handled.
- c. Platforms and conveyors should be built at about waist height to minimize awkward postures. Conveyors or carts should be used for horizontal motion whenever possible. Reduce the size or weight of the object(s) lifted.
- d. High-strength push-pull requirements are undesirable, but pushing is better than pulling. Material handling equipment should be easy to move, with handles that can be easily grasped in an upright posture.
- e. Workbench or workstation configurations can force people to bend over. Corrections should emphasize adjustments necessary for the employee to remain in a relaxed upright stance or fully supported, seated posture. Bending the upper body and spine to reach into a bin or container is highly undesirable. The bins should be elevated, tilted or equipped with collapsible sides to improve access.
- f. Repetitive or sustained twisting, stretching, or leaning to one side are undesirable. Corrections could include repositioning bins and moving employees closer to parts and conveyors.
- g. Store heavy objects at waist level.
- h. Provide lift-assist devices, and lift tables.

Safety Tune Up: Did You Know?

Standing for extended periods places excessive stress on the back and legs. Solutions include a footrest or rail, resilient floor mats, height-adjustable chairs or stools, and opportunities for the employee to change position.



SAFETY MEETING

FOR THE APARTMENT INDUSTRY

COMPANY NAME _____ JOB NAME _____ DATE _____

WHAT IS YOUR BACK IQ?

Back injuries are a painful, sometimes debilitating, problem in many industries. Back strains can often be avoided by reducing the size or weight of materials handled by employees, by using mechanical aids such as hoists, conveyers or hydraulic lifts, and by making certain that employees are well trained in lifting techniques. But the key to back care lies with the individual worker. Everyone should be a back care "expert" and be able to answer the following questions:

Q: What's the most important lifting rule to remember?

A: Keep The Load Close! There are many other lifting rules, like "bend your knees and lift with your legs," but you can't do this in every situation. Research has also shown that leg muscles become fatigued when frequent lifts are required, so other techniques must be used as well.

Q: If you don't hold a load close to your body, how much heavier is the "experienced" weight than the actual weight?

A: Ten times as heavy! The back operates as a simple lever, with the fulcrum in the lower back. Back muscles serve as the power arm; the load being lifted is the weight arm, and a 10-1 lever ratio exists in the lower back. The further away you hold the load, the "heavier" it is.

Q: Why never twist with a load?

A: Lumbar (lower back) vertebrae, disks and joints are under the most vertical pressure when lifting a load. Twisting with a load creates a "shearing" effect on these tissues. The more "mileage" you have on your back, the less forgiving it will be under this pressure.

Q: Which muscles are most important for keeping the spine in its strong S-shaped curve?

A: Abdominal muscles, which work in cooperation with back muscles to support your spine. The trouble is, abdominals tend to weaken over time. It helps to tighten them during a heavy lift, but more importantly, keep them in good shape.

Q: How can stress in your life impact back pain?

A: Whether you're aware of it or not, emotional stress can tighten muscles. Often, fatigued back muscles are the most impacted and the first to feel it. It's been said that back ache is just a tension headache that "slipped."

Q: What time of the day are back strains most likely to happen?

A: In the morning, or at the beginning of a work shift, when muscles aren't "warmed up." Trends also show an increase following the lunch hour, perhaps because blood circulation is in the stomach, instead of the large muscles, and because people may be sleepy and inattentive then.

Q: How does keeping flexible help prevent back and muscle strains?

A: Muscles tend to shorten when not used to their full capacity. Flexible muscles are less likely to be strained and injured than "tight" muscles, when sudden or heavy power is required. Pre-work stretching programs have been very successful in preventing back and muscle strains. Take a tip from professional athletes--they warm up before a game! Even five minutes helps!

SPECIAL TOPICS FOR YOUR PROJECT: _____

EMPLOYEE SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

Meeting attended by:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Supervisor's Signature: _____

Fax this page to the head of your safety team

THE AGENDA

- Resolve Material Handling Issues Before They Become A Problem
- Strains
- Sprains
- Shoulder Pain
- Back Injuries

Real solutions for some of the most commonly reported OTJ injuries.

You're Invited to A Safety Seminar

April 25, 2007

10:00 to 11:30 a.m.

Association Offices

30375 Northwestern Hwy

Farmington Hills, Michigan 48334

Contact Brenda Boomer at

bboomer@spsinsurance.com for details



OR CURRENT OCCUPANT



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