

Safe Lifting Tips: Protecting your Back

September 2017

Over the last 5 years, UL Lafayette Employees had 86 recordable injuries, directly or indirectly caused by incorrect lifting techniques that included:

Incorrect lifting; incorrect holding or carrying; twisting during the lift; pushing or pulling objects incorrectly; bending incorrectly; struck or injured by an object handled or carried by someone else; caught in-between the object handled; and reaching for an object incorrectly.

Even if you lift objects regularly, or very rarely, the techniques to follow are always the same. Using poor lifting techniques are a MAJOR cause of back pain and injuries both at home and at work. By following the steps listed below, we can prevent a lot of pain and protect the longevity of our back and muscles.

1. **Warm up those cold muscles before lifting anything.** Stretching increases flexibility, gives you a greater range of motion, improves your posture and increases circulation.
2. **Plan your lift.** You do not want to run into problems or obstacles with a load in your arms. Ask yourself, Can I carry this on my own; can I grip this; where am I going; is the path clear; any slipping hazards, can I place this down safely?
3. **Adopt a stable position:** Keep your body as strong and balanced as possible, feet shoulder width apart and close to the object.
4. **Use the correct lifting technique:** Use legs (not back), do not bend your back, look forward and breathe.
 - a. Squat bending at hips and knees and look forward (keeping back straight)
 - b. Grip object, engage core muscles and lift slowly straightening legs & hips (exhaling as lifting)
 - c. Elbows stay close into your body as you lift to reduce strain, keeping load close to waist
 - d. Keep movements smooth (not jerky and rushed movements) and keep breathing
 - e. Always keep load close to body near the waist and solar plexus (abdomen)
5. **Do not twist!** This causes loss of balance and strain. Shoulders should always face the same direction as hips. Turn with your feet (not your waist), after the load is lifted.
6. **Do not lift a load that is too heavy.** Use a trolley, or ask someone to give you a hand. Communicate and use teamwork (lifting in sync with each other).
7. **The Load should be balanced.** Try to distribute the load evenly to each hand.
8. **Try not to obscure your view.** Even light loads can be dangerous when you cannot see. This also causes bad posture. You are more at risk of dropping these type of loads. Make more than one trip if necessary.
9. **Put down object properly.** You should not have to throw or drop the load at this point.
 - a. Plan where to place
 - b. Hold object close to body (elbows tight into your sides)
 - c. Look ahead keeping back straight, bend knees and hips Lower yourself down into a squat position
 - d. Place object down carefully
 - e. Keep your back and eyes straight forward as you use your legs to lift you back into standing position
10. **Strengthen your core muscles.** The stronger your core is, the more support your spine is going to get. You can do this through Pilates, yoga and swimming as an example.
11. **Wear the right clothing.** Use gloves, boots and back support belt, whenever possible.