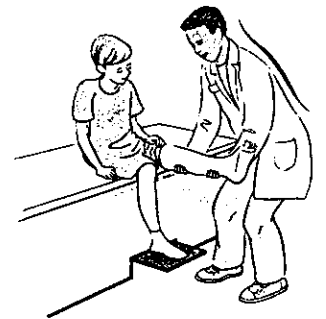
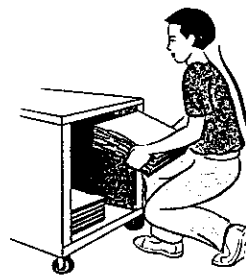


Back Tips

FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS



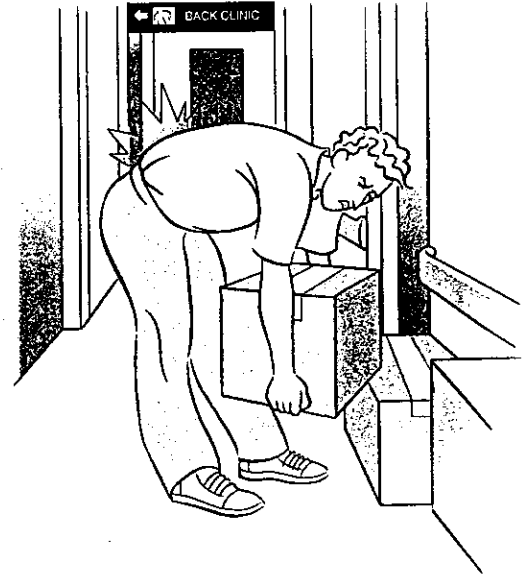
YOUR BACK Is At Risk

Many activities can put your back at risk. Lifting, pushing, and pulling loads can damage your back. So can bending, reaching, or working at a desk or a lab bench. As a healthcare worker, you may have seen firsthand the pain and misery a back injury can cause. The good news is that you can learn some simple ways to reduce the risk of injuring your back.

What Can Cause Back Injury

Back injury can be due to many causes. These include:

- Using a poor lifting technique.
- Lifting or moving loads that are too heavy.
- Standing, sitting, and walking with poor posture.
- Working without warming up first.
- Weakness or tightness in the muscles that support the spine.
- Long-term wear and tear on your back.



You Can Protect Your Back

This booklet can help you:

- **Understand your back.** Learn about your back and how it can be injured. (See pages 4 to 5.)
- **Work more safely.** Learn to use the **Safety Zone**, a way of working within your back's natural limits. (See pages 6 to 12.)
- **Use self-care.** Take care of your body on and off the job. Exercise and other healthy habits can help you reduce your risk of injury. (See pages 13 to 15.)

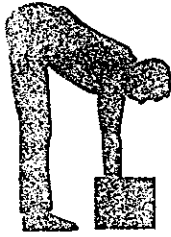


This booklet is not intended to replace your employer's health and safety policies. Only your employer can establish the specific guidelines appropriate for your job.
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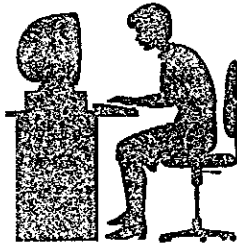
Looking at Your Risks

These pictures show some positions that can be risky for your back. Do any of the pictures below match positions you use at work? If they do, circle the picture.

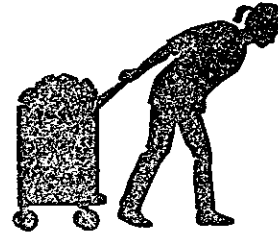
Risky Positions for Your Back



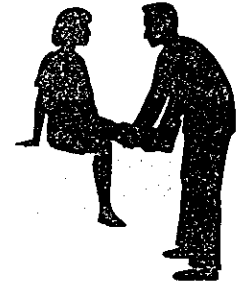
I often bend at the waist to lift loads.



I spend a lot of time hunched over a desk.



I do a lot of pulling.



I don't think about my back when caring for patients.

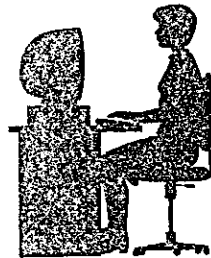
Reducing Your Risks

You can reduce your risk of injury by moving in ways that protect your back. Below are examples of how to protect your back in common work situations. Making changes like these in the way you work each day can help prevent injury.

Safer Positions for Your Back



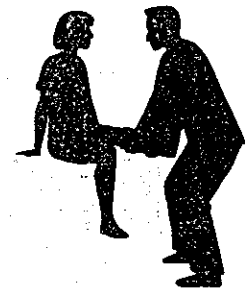
Bend from the knees and hips as you lift loads.



Support your back as you sit at a desk.



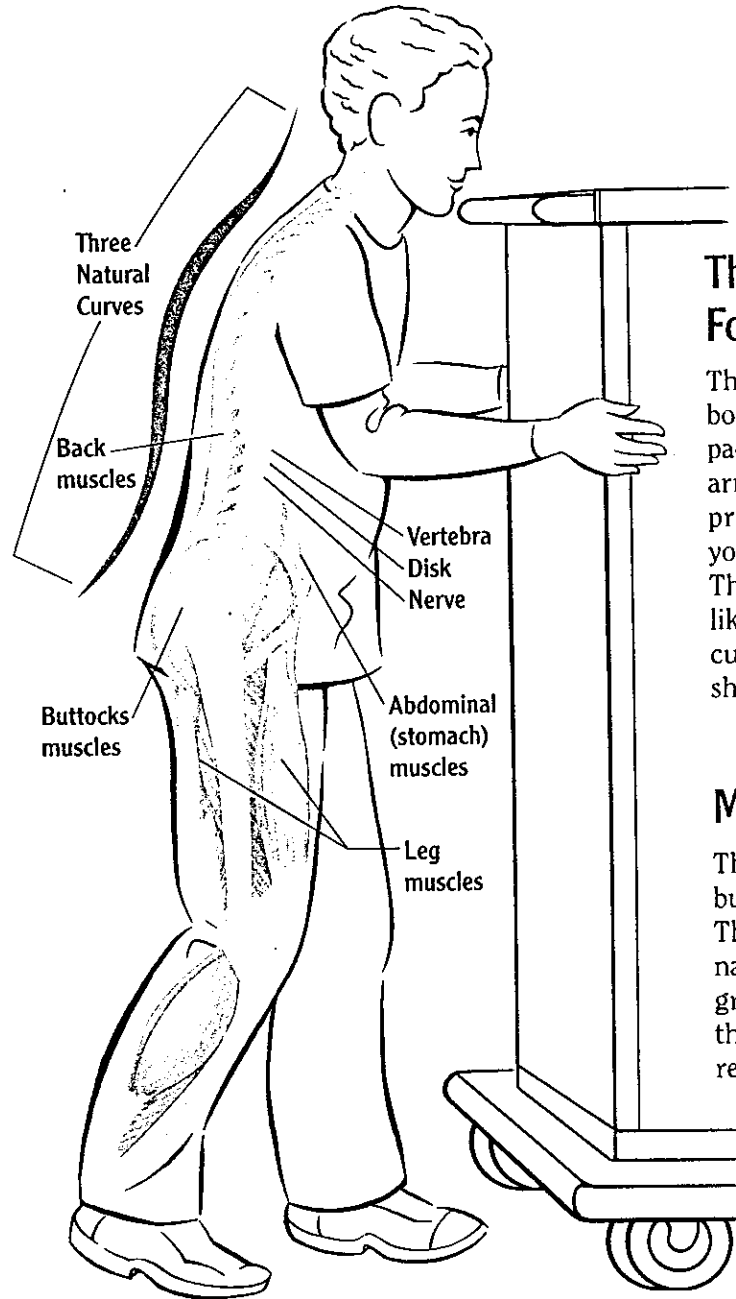
Push instead of pull whenever you can.



Think about your back during patient care.

YOUR BACK at Work

A healthy back supports the body's weight and lets you move freely. Back health depends on maintaining the back's three natural curves. And it depends on keeping the muscles that support the spine strong and limber. Keeping your back healthy takes some effort. Certain ways of moving help limit stress on the back and help prevent back injury.



Three Natural Curves Form the Spine

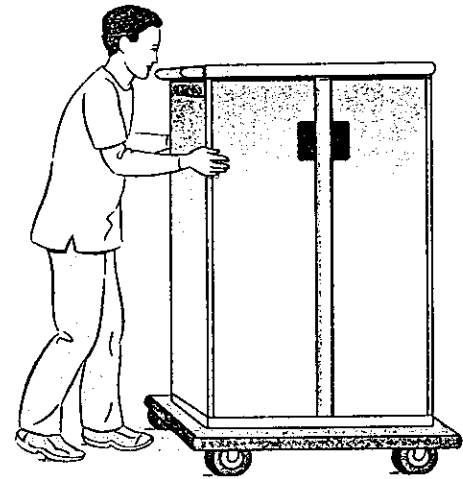
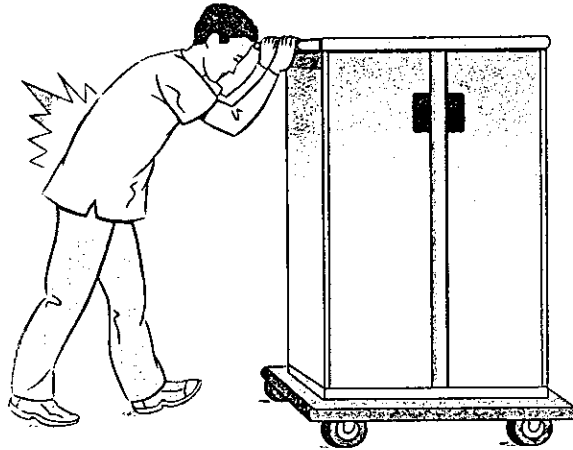
The spine is made up of a column of bones (**vertebrae**). These are cushioned by pads of spongy tissue (**disks**). The spine is arranged in three curves. When they are properly aligned, these curves support your weight at rest and when you move. This support makes back injury less likely. To align your back's three natural curves, relax and stand with your ears, shoulders, and hips in a straight line.

Muscles Support the Spine

The muscles of your back, stomach, buttocks, and thighs support your spine. They help maintain the back's three natural curves. By keeping these muscle groups strong and flexible, you help them do their jobs well. This helps reduce your risk of back injury.

Your Back in Motion

As you walk, sit, bend, and lift, you put stress on your back. Too much stress can cause injury and pain. Good posture and good lifting techniques limit stress on your back. By learning and using these techniques, you can reduce the chance that you'll be injured.



How the Back Gets Hurt

Poor posture and unsafe lifting technique place extra stress on the back. This can lead to muscle pain, as muscles tighten and go into spasm to support the spine. Disks can flatten or bulge in response to uneven pressure. Bone spurs can form on the vertebrae. When bulging disks or bone spurs press on the spinal cord and the nerves leaving the spinal canal, nerve damage and pain can result.

Keeping Your Back Healthy

To protect your back:

- **Hold loads close** to your body.
- **Turn with your feet** instead of twisting your upper body.
- **Use your leg and stomach muscles** as you lift.
- **Keep your feet apart** for a better base of support.
- **Avoid holding your breath** as you lift.
- **Know your limits.** No matter how careful you are, moving loads that are too heavy can hurt your back. Get help, or use lifting equipment.

Wear and Tear Can Harm Your Back

Back injuries don't always happen suddenly. Often they're the result of years of "wear and tear." Stress on the back may cause it to slowly weaken. And minor back injuries may not heal properly. Over time, this can lead to back pain that won't go away. By moving with care each day, you can limit this damage.

the Safety Zone

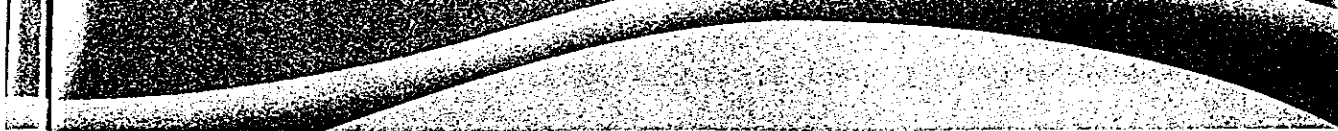
When a load is held close to your body, it puts less strain on your back and neck. As a load gets further away from your body, it puts more stress on your back. To lift and move objects safely, use the Safety Zone as a guideline. The Zone works like a traffic light. When an object is in your Green Zone, **go** ahead. When an object is in your Yellow Zone, **use caution**. And when an object is in your Red Zone, **stop**.



Green Zone: Go

To find your Green Zone, keep your elbows at your sides. Move your fists up to your shoulders and down to your thighs. The area where you're moving your arms is the Green Zone. Tension in your back is lowest when you hold a load in this zone. If a load is too heavy or large for you to hold it in your Green Zone, get help to lift or push it.





Yellow Zone: Caution

To find your Yellow Zone, hold your arms out at shoulder height. Then bring your fists down to your thighs. The area where you're moving your arms is the Yellow Zone. Tension in your back is greater when you hold an object in this area. You may sometimes need to use your Yellow Zone. But when you do, be careful. Work slowly and reduce the size of the load. And use your Green Zone whenever you can. What could the worker in this picture do to get the load into her Green Zone?



Red Zone: Stop

The Red Zone is any area outside your Green and Yellow Zones. When you work in the Red Zone, your back can't safely support the weight of the load. To avoid working in this area, bend from the knees and hips to get closer to the load. In some cases, rearranging your workspace or using special equipment can help bring the load into your Yellow or Green Zone. What could the worker in this picture do to make it easier to work in his Green or Yellow Zone?



WORKING in Your Safety Zone

Knowing your Safety Zone can help you protect your back as you work. Keep loads in your Green Zone as much as you can. Always remember to keep your back's three natural curves aligned. If a load is too heavy, use equipment or get help to move it.

Lifting

Lifting is the most common cause of back injury among healthcare workers.

- Keep the load close to your body, inside your Green Zone.
- Assess the weight and size of the load before lifting. Don't try to lift too much at one time. Break up loads if necessary.
- Keep your feet apart for good balance.
- Bend at the knees and hips, not the waist.
- Use your leg and stomach muscles as you lift.
- Don't twist your back as you lift.



Turning

When turning, you may be tempted to twist, which can strain your back.

- Keep the load in front of you. That's where your Green Zone is.
- Step with your feet in the direction of the turn. Your shoulders and hips should turn at the same time.
- Use your arms and legs to do the work, not your back.



Safety Tips

- Watch out for slippery surfaces.
- Watch out for obstacles.
- Follow workplace safety rules.

Bending

Tasks such as emptying catheters, making beds, and cleaning under desks require bending, which can put your back at risk.

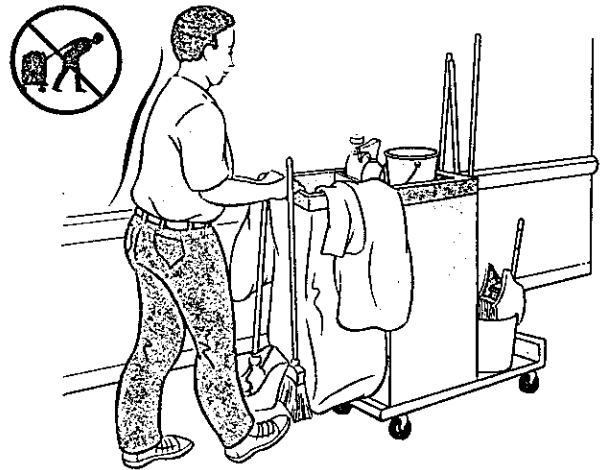
- Hold the broom or mop so that your hands are in your Green or Yellow Zone.
- Bend at the knees and hips, not the waist.
- When leaning forward, move your whole body, not just your arms.



Pushing and Pulling

Moving trash bins, carts, beds, and other large objects can strain your back.

- Pushing is always safer for your back than pulling, so push instead of pull whenever you can.
- Keep your elbows as close to your waist as possible. This helps keep the load closer to your Green Zone.
- Don't go too fast. If the object you're pushing goes out of control, you may strain your back.



Reaching

Reaching for supplies, especially in high places, can put stress on your back.

- Use a stepladder to reach higher areas. This helps you keep the load in your Green Zone.
- Arrange shelves so that heavy items and items you reach for often are stored between hip and shoulder height.
- When getting an object off a shelf, slide it to the edge, toward your body. Test its weight by pushing up on one corner. Then change your grip and bring the load from your Yellow Zone into your Green Zone.



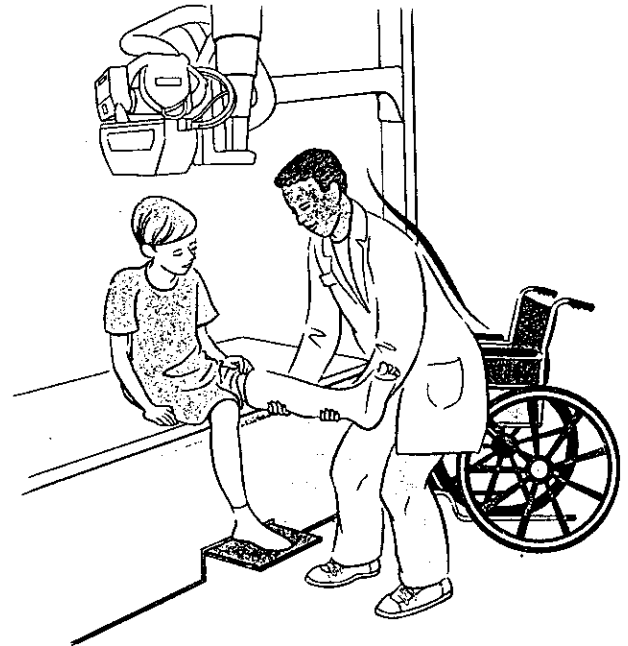
LIFTING and Moving Patients

Use the Safety Zone when you're lifting and moving patients. Get as close to the patient as you can, and keep your three natural curves aligned. To lift more safely, plan each lift. Use the proper tools and equipment. And work with other staff to keep everyone safe.

Take Care with Each Lift

To protect yourself and the patient, follow these steps:

- **Plan the move.** Find out what team and tools you need to do the lift safely.
- **Get ready to lift.** Put together a team and the right tools.
- **Lift safely.** Use proper lifting technique to protect your back throughout the move.



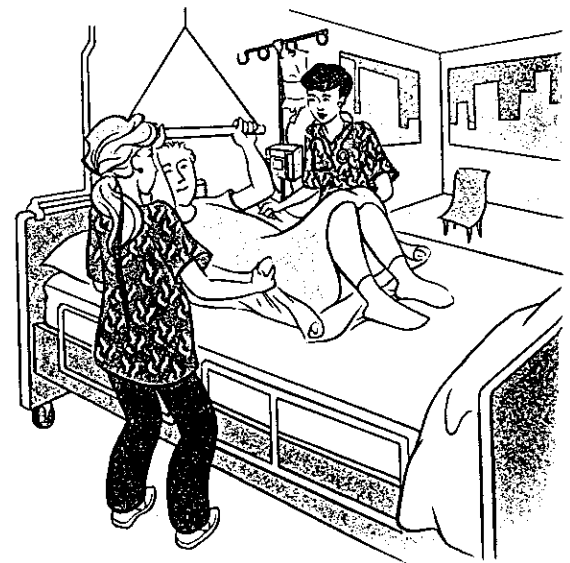
Use the Right Tools

Using tools to help you lift and move patients can reduce strain on your back.

- **Drawsheets** give you something to hold as you move patients in bed.
- **Slide boards** and other lateral transfer devices help you slide a patient from one flat surface to another.
- **Trapezes** let patients help when they're being moved in bed.
- **Transfer belts** (gait belts) fit around a patient's waist to give you a handhold.
- **Mechanical lifting devices** may be safest for certain patients and types of lifts.

Use Teamwork

Most patients are too heavy to be lifted or moved safely by one person. Two or more people lifting together (team lift) helps reduce the risk of a fall or injury. So ask for help when you need it, and give help when you're asked. The patient can be part of the team, too. Sometimes patients can help by pushing with their arms or legs.



Tips for Lifting and Moving Patients

Plan the move

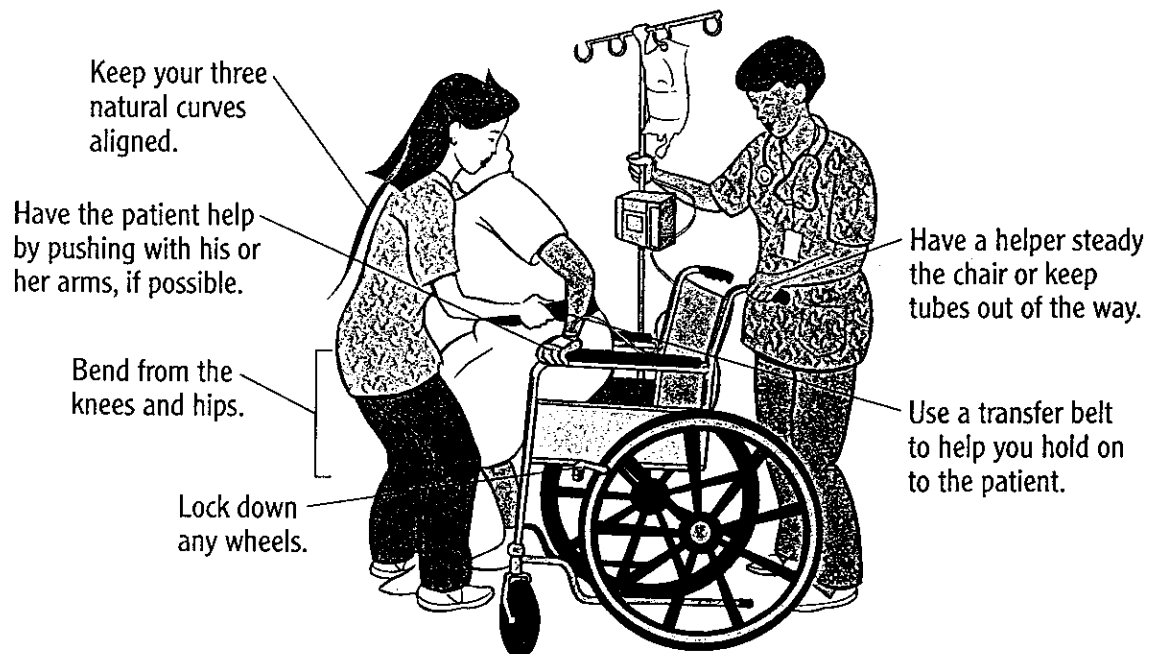
- Assess how many people will be needed to do the lift. Keep the option of using a lifting device in mind.
- Decide what types of tools are needed.
- Find out whether the patient can help.
- Check for hazards such as IVs, catheters, and wet floors.

Get ready to lift

- Gather a team. Make sure each person knows his or her role.
- Make sure you have the right tools in place.
- Explain to the patient what you're doing and how he or she can help.
- Adjust bed height. Secure wheels. Free up tubes and lines.

Lift safely

- Keep the patient within your Green Zone throughout the lift.
- Keep your feet apart for good balance.
- Bend your knees. Use your legs and stomach muscles as you lift.
- Turn with your feet instead of twisting.
- Take your time. Don't rush. Avoid holding your breath as you lift.
- Do lifts in stages. For example, first move the patient to the edge of the bed. Then move the patient onto the stretcher (gurney).

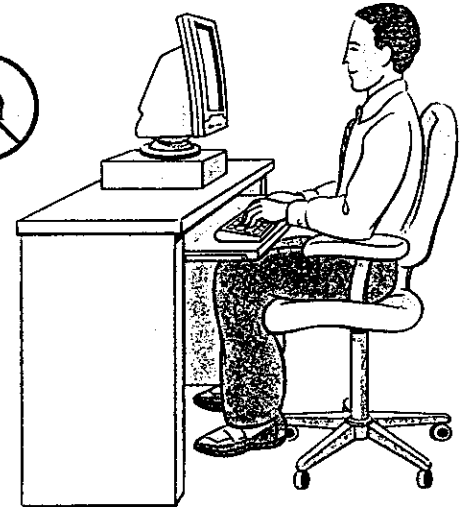


Your Work Area

The Safety Zone applies whether you're working with patients, at a desk, in a file room, or at a lab bench. Arrange your work area so that the tools you use are at the right height. Make sure that your back is supported and comfortable. And change positions often to help keep tension from building up as you work.

Working at a Desk

- **Adjust your chair or use a backrest** to support your lower back. Adjust your chair height so that your forearms are parallel to the floor.
- **Adjust your monitor height** so that your neck is in a comfortable position. Start with the top of the monitor at eye level and adjust as needed.
- **Keep your feet firmly on the floor** or on a footrest.
- **Change positions often.** Take stretch breaks. Save errands that take you away from your desk and do them when you need a break from sitting.



Working at a Lab Bench

- **Adjust microscopes** and other lab equipment so that you can use them without hunching your shoulders.
- **Change positions often.** Alternate between sitting and standing. Stand with one foot on a low footstool, switching feet often. Stretch and take short walks to release tension in your back and neck.
- **Make sure that your work is at the right height.** When standing, you may need to raise your work with a wooden or plastic box. This can help keep your neck and upper back at a comfortable angle.



Reaching and Twisting

- **Keep often-used objects** within easy reach.
- **Use stepladders** to reach high shelves.
- **Get up from your seat** to reach objects that are outside your Safety Zone.
- **Turn your entire body** instead of twisting. Keep your hips and feet pointed in the same direction.
- **Support your upper body** when reaching down for an object. Lean one hand on a flat surface and reach with the other.

STRETCHING for Recovery

Stretching can help relieve muscle tension. Take short breaks during the day to stretch and go for a little walk. The best stretches for you depend on the type of work you do. A doctor or physical therapist can suggest proper stretches for your job. Some common stretches are shown below. They can be done almost anywhere. If you have back problems, talk with your doctor before trying the stretches.

Tension Release

1. Sit up straight in a chair.
2. Tuck your chin slightly and tilt your head to the left, chin toward the right.
3. Place your left hand on the upper right side of your head. Gently pull your head to the left.
4. Hold for 10 seconds.
5. Switch sides and repeat the exercise.



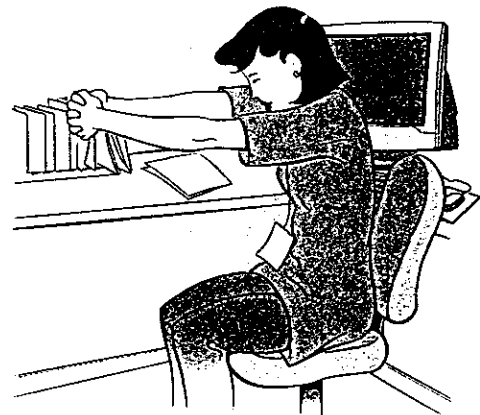
Shoulder/Chest Stretch

1. Sit toward the edge of a chair and place your hands on your hips.
2. Squeeze your elbows and shoulder blades together.
3. Feel the stretch over your upper chest.
4. Hold for 20 seconds.



Upper Back Stretch

1. Do this stretch standing or sitting.
2. Clasp your hands together in front of your chest.
3. Reach forward with your clasped hands. Gently drop your head toward your chest.
4. Feel the stretch between your shoulder blades.
5. Hold for 20 seconds.





in Shape

Exercise is great for your back. It keeps your stomach, back, and leg muscles strong and flexible. This helps to support your spine. Exercise can also improve your energy level and help you sleep better. That helps you be more alert and better able to protect your back.

Walk to Better Back Fitness

Walking is an exercise that almost everyone can do. Make it a goal to walk for at least 20 minutes most days. To get started, try these tips:

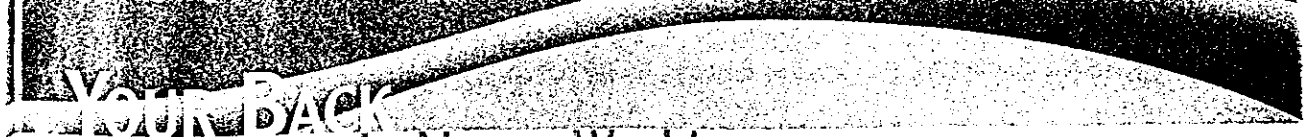
- **Begin with a 5- to 10-minute walk.** Add a few more minutes each day. Or take two or three short walks each day.
- **Wear a good pair of walking or jogging shoes.** This helps reduce the impact on your back.
- **Walk to visit a friend** instead of talking on the phone. When doing errands, walk instead of driving.
- **Add short walks to your day** whenever you can. Park your car further from your destination. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.



Do Complementary Exercises

You may feel that you already get plenty of exercise at work. But it may not be the best type of exercise for your back. Try doing exercises that differ from what you do at work. For example, if your work involves a lot of lifting, try a stretching class, yoga, or tai chi. If you do a lot of sitting, try strength training. Your main goal is to improve the endurance, strength, and flexibility of your back, leg, and stomach muscles.





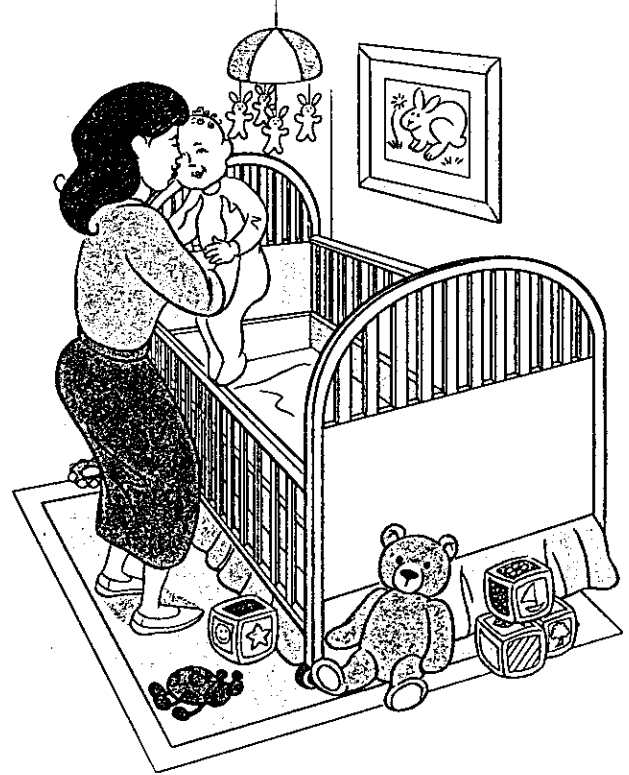
YOUR BACK Is Always Working

When you lift, sit, stand, or even sleep, you use your back. So you need to take care of your back around the clock. Protecting your back can help you feel better whether you're on or off the job.

Protect Your Back Each Day

Take care of your back on and off the job:

- **Use good posture and lifting technique** when you're carrying groceries, picking up a child, or working in your home or garden.
- **Warm up before work.** A short walk, even across the parking lot or up the stairs, is a great warm-up.
- **Shift positions often.** When you're watching TV, reading, or listening to music, stretch and move around every 20 minutes or so.



Form Healthy Habits

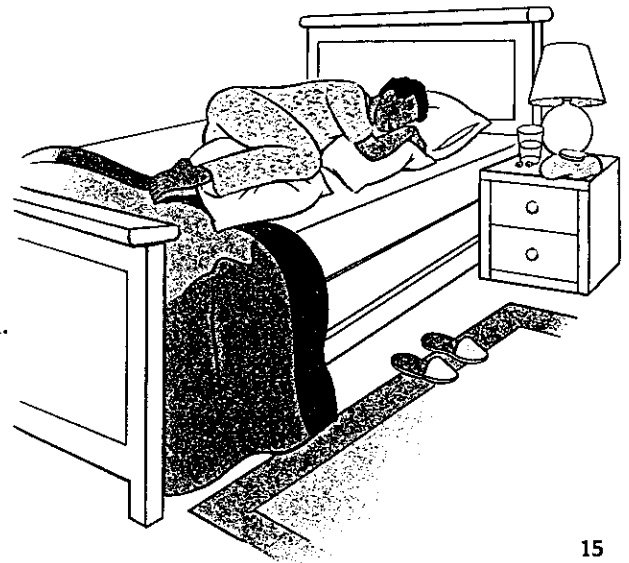
You can learn more about these common health concerns at the library or on the Internet:

- **Getting enough sleep.** This can be a challenge if you work night shift. Ask your doctor for tips on getting restful sleep.
- **Maintaining a healthy weight.** Excess weight increases the load on your back. If you need to lose weight, ask your doctor about a weight-loss program.
- **Coping with stress.** A stress-reduction class can help you learn ways to release tension.

Take Care of Backaches

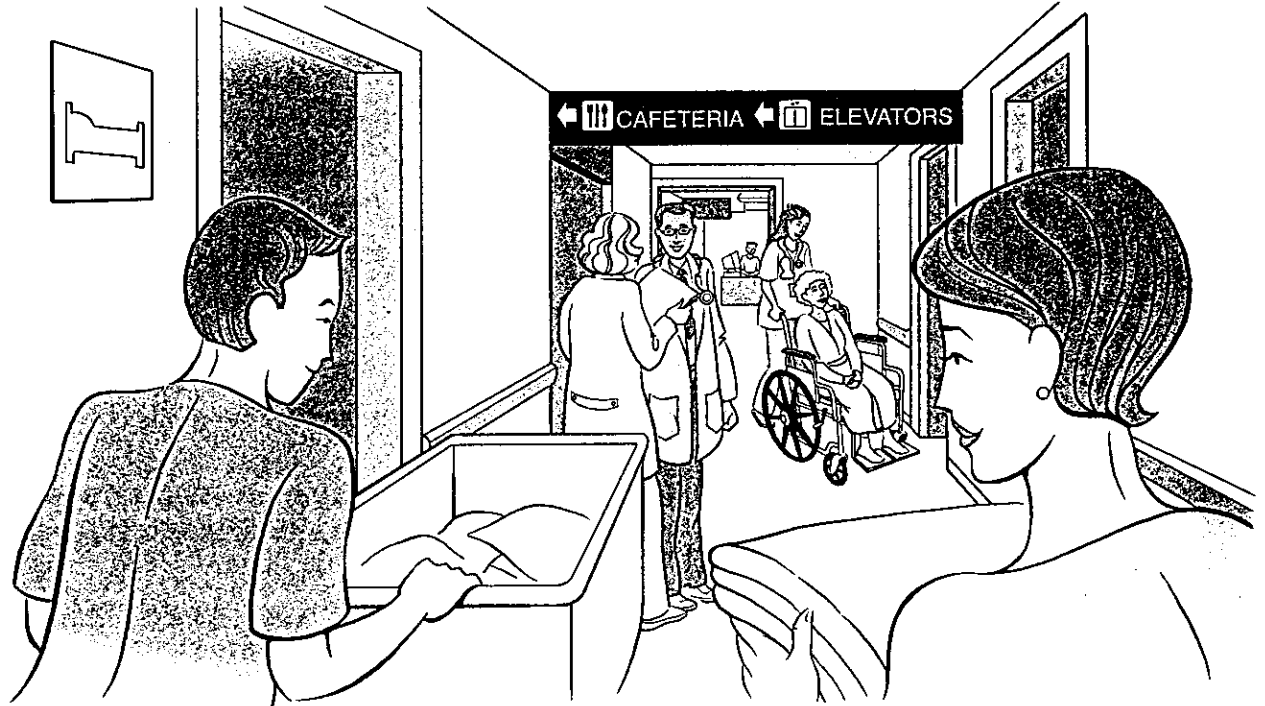
If you have a backache or pain, try these steps:

- **Rest in a position** that reduces your symptoms. Try lying on your side with a pillow between your legs. Keep in mind that sitting may worsen the pain.
- **Use an ice pack** on your back. Do this for up to 20 minutes at a time. Keep a thin cloth between the cold source and your skin.
- **Use pain relievers** as directed by your doctor.
- **See your doctor** if the pain persists or is severe.



YOU ARE THE BACKBONE of a Safer Workplace

When you take care of your back, you work better, feel better, and lose less time from the job. You provide improved care for patients and support for coworkers. So everyone benefits. Do yourself and others in your workplace a favor—take care of your back.



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