
Office Safety

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B. Strains and Overexertion

Although a typical office job may not involve lifting large or especially heavy objects, it's important to follow the principles of safe lifting. Small, light loads (i.e., stacks of files, boxes of computer paper, books) can wreak havoc on your back, neck, and shoulders if you use your body incorrectly when you lift them. Backs are especially vulnerable; most back injuries result from improper lifting. Before you pick up a carton or load, ask yourself these questions:

Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?

How high do I have to lift it?

How far do I have to carry it?

Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

If you feel that the lift is beyond your ability, contact your supervisor or ask another employee to assist you.

Safe Lifting Steps

Take a balanced stance, feet placed shoulder-width apart. When lifting something from the floor, squat close to the load.

Keep your back in its neutral or straight position. Tuck in your chin so your head and neck continue the straight back line.

Grip the object with your whole hand, rather than only with your fingers. Draw the object close to you, holding your elbows close to your body to keep the load and your body weight centered.

Lift by straightening your legs. Let your leg muscles, not your back muscles, do the work. Tighten your stomach muscles to help support your back. Maintain your neutral back position as you lift.

Never twist when lifting. When you must turn with a load, turn your whole body, feet first.

Never carry a load that blocks your vision.

To set something down, use the same body mechanics designed for lifting.

Lifting from A Seated Position

Bending from a seated position and coming back up places tremendous strain on your back. Also, your chair could be unstable and slip out from under you. Instead, stand and move your chair out of the way. Squat and stand whenever you have to retrieve something from the floor.

Ergonomic Solutions to Backbreaking Tasks

If you are doing a lot of twisting while lifting, try to rearrange the space to avoid this. People who have to twist under a load are more likely to suffer back injury.

Rotate through tasks so that periods of standing alternate with moving or sitting. Ask for stools or footrests for stationary jobs.

Store materials at knee level whenever possible instead of on the floor. Make shelves shallower (12-18") so one does not have to reach forward to lift the object. Break up loads so each weighs less.

If you must carry a heavy object some distance, consider storing it closer, request a table to rest it on, or try to use a hand truck or cart to transport it.