

## Back Basics

A back injury can be just the beginning of a lifetime of pain, inability to work or play, reduced income and unhappy dealings with medical agencies.

A serious back injury disrupts your life. Since our back is used in all tasks we perform - on and off-the job, the exact cause of the injury may be difficult to pinpoint, leading to discouraging disputes about compensation. Therapy may be ineffective and there may be differences of opinion about your ability to hold a job again.

There is an alternative to the back injury nightmare. You can follow safe work practices to prevent injuries, and you can practice back care at all times.

Back injuries fall into two general categories. The first is a traumatic injury caused by an isolated incident. A fall, a motor vehicle wreck or a misjudged dive into water are some common causes of back injuries. If the spinal cord is injured, the victim may lose the use of his legs or both arms and legs.

### **These are some practices to prevent traumatic back injuries:**

- Always wear a seatbelt in a motor vehicle.
- Never ride with a driver who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Wear the correct fall arrest equipment and follow all safe work practices when working at heights.
- Before diving into water, be sure it is deep enough and there are no underwater obstructions.
- Don't mix alcohol or drugs with water sports, snowmobiling or other recreational activities.

The second category of back injury is cumulative. Years of back abuse and minor strains and sprains add up to a back injury which can be seriously disabling.

### **These are some ways to prevent cumulative back injuries:**

- Lift correctly. Size up the load before attempting to pick it up. Get help from other workers or a mechanical lifting device if necessary.
- Lift the load using the strength in your legs, not your back. Do this by bending the knees and keeping the back straight. Crouch down close to the object and lift by straightening your legs.
- Do not twist, bend or extend your arms when you are carrying an object. Always hold the object as close to your body as possible.
- Do not pick up or put down an object above your shoulder height. Use a stepladder or stepstool if necessary.
- Plan your route ahead of time when you are carrying an item, including where you will set it down.
- Don't attempt to catch a heavy object if it falls or someone tosses it to you.
- Don't sit or stand too long in one position. If your job requires you to stand, alternate feet on a raised footrest. Floor mats can also help back strains of workers who are required to stand at their work stations throughout their shift.
- Practice good posture at all times, reasonably straight while maintaining the three natural curves in your back.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Excess pounds, particularly at the abdomen, put a strain on your back.

*Back care is a safety basic that must be part of every activity you do. Lift carefully, practice good posture and use caution at work and off the job to prevent back problems.*