

Assess your risk

Assess your risk for back injury in your workplace

- The heavier the load, the greater risk to your back.
- If you're twisting when lifting a heavy load, that will place abnormal stress on your back.
- Jobs that don't involve a lot of movement, like driving a car or sitting at a work station for prolonged periods, have the same predisposition for back problems.
- Jobs that involve abnormal postures, excessive muscular activity, or static loading (for example, if your arms remain outstretched) also pose a risk.
- Situations where a weight shifts suddenly while being lifted can also create problems (an ambulance attendant's work, for example).

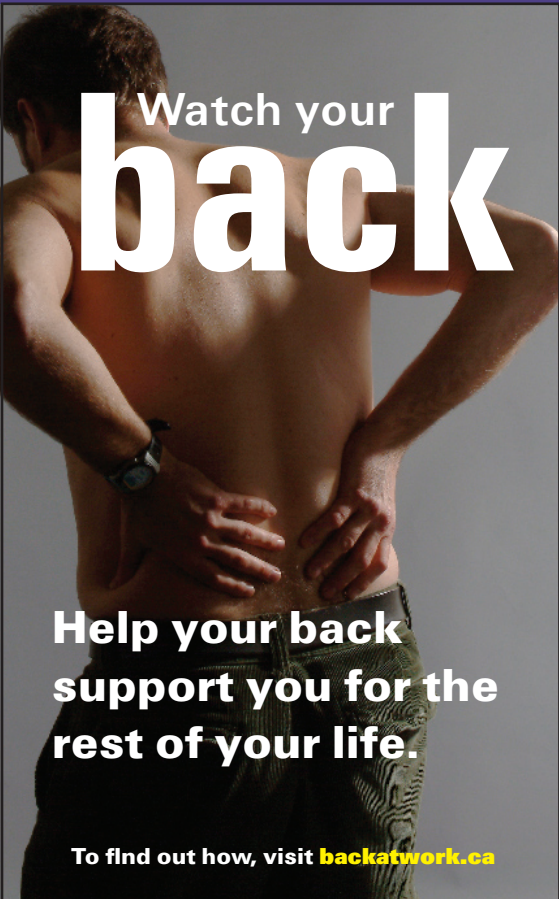
Causes of back injuries

- Improper lifting
- Poor posture
- Overexertion
- Other disabilities or medical conditions
- Physical and mental stress
- Slips and falls
- Excessive weight
- Lack of exercise

Signs & symptoms of back injuries

The symptoms of back pain vary depending on the injury and the person:


- Numbness, tingling, or burning into the legs
- Limited ability to sit or stand
- Pain, tightness, or stiffness
- Decreased range of motion
- Spasms




Watch your back

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Watch your back

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Back facts

Back strains account for roughly 25 percent of all WorkSafeBC claims.

Back pain has been identified as the most common cause of activity limitation in adults under 45 years of age, and is second only to arthritis among people between 45 and 65 years of age.

Musculoskeletal conditions cost Canada \$16.4 billion in direct treatment costs and lost productivity each year.

The back

The back supports the upper body, protects the spinal cord, and allows flexibility.

The back has four natural curves: at the neck, the middle back, the lower back, and tailbone. These curves support your weight and absorb stress. The spine contains 24 hard bones called vertebrae. The vertebrae are separated by cushions — called discs — that absorb shock when you move. Fluid inside the discs allows you to move freely. Too much of the wrong type of movement can cause abnormal wear and tear, which can lead to back injuries.

When you lift, most of the stress is absorbed by your spine in the lower back. To take some pressure away from your spine, increase your intra-abdominal pressure. Intra-abdominal pressure occurs with the simultaneous contractions of the stomach, back, diaphragm, and pelvic floor muscles. When these muscles tighten, the abdominal cavity gives added support to the spine.

Here are some things to consider when it comes to the health of your back:

Lifting

Maintain a natural posture.

You'll notice your lower back curves naturally when standing straight. Do your best to maintain this posture while lifting, lowering, or moving. This position assures the greatest spinal and back stability.



Hug that load.

Holding a load close to your belly and body reduces the strain placed on the muscles of your back and trunk. If required, wear protective clothing to prevent sharp objects from causing injury.



Flex your abs.

Contracting your abdominal muscles or "bracing" when lifting, lowering, or moving improves your spinal stability. Even slight abdominal contractions can greatly reduce your likelihood of getting injured.



Don't do the twist.

Twisting decreases the stability of your back and increases your likelihood of injury. To turn, pivot with your feet rather than twisting your body.

Posture & sitting

Do:

- Organize your workstation to avoid repetitive bending, twisting, or reaching while seated.
- Sit in a chair that is low enough to place both feet on the floor — but no lower than that.
- Have a chair that supports your lower back in a slightly arched position.
- Use an arm rest whenever possible to reduce stress to the upper body and neck.
- Remove your wallet or other bulky materials from your back pockets.
- Remember proper posture when talking on the telephone.
- Sit close to your work.



Don't:

- Sit slumped. Your lower back should be supported.
- Lean forward and downward to reach your work.
- Sit for long periods of time without getting up.
- Cradle the telephone in the crook of your neck.
- Sit on the floor.

Stretching

Taking time out to stretch can reduce accumulated tension and allow your body to move with greater ease and comfort.

Regular stretching will:

- Make activities easier because it prepares the muscles for movement.
- Reduce muscle tension and allow you to feel more relaxed.
- Increase range of motion in all joints.
- Help reduce stress and its effects.
- Develop body awareness.
- Permit easier movement.
- Prevent injuries.
- Feel good!

How to stretch:

There is a right and wrong way to stretch:

- The right way is a relaxed and held (sustained) stretch with your attention focused on the muscle you're stretching.
- The wrong way is to repeatedly bounce, bob, jerk, or stretch to the point of pain.
- Improper stretching can cause more harm than good.



Bending & crouching

- Whether you:
 - bend from a seated position
 - bend from a standing position
 - crouch with both feet flat on the floor
 - crouch on one or both knees
- Keep your back straight, maintain your normal curve, support your weight, and bend at the hips and knees!
- When bending or crouching, support your weight with your free hand by leaning on a desk, your thigh, or whatever is available. Keep your feet apart for greater stability and balance.
- When combining crouching or bending with reaching, stabilize yourself and maintain your lumbar curve.



Strengthening

- Muscle maintenance is a life skill. Incorporate simple core strengthening exercises into daily activities to ensure you work at building muscle strength on a daily basis.
- Remember to push yourself only a little bit in order to make progress. Start slowly, but be prepared to add to the difficulty or repetition of your exercises on a weekly basis. Never sacrifice form.
- Pace yourself and stay within your personal limits.
- Be comfortable and have fun. A little bit of discomfort can be okay at first, but there shouldn't be a lot of pain. Don't strain yourself.
- Gentle, relaxed breathing is the secret for stretch-relaxation exercises.
- Whenever possible, avoid arching your back when exercising.
- Consult with a chiropractor before starting your exercise program.