

*Editor's Note: Association Newsletter Article – March 2010*

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## **Back to the Basics: Proper Techniques to Prevent Back Injuries**

Lifting, reaching, bending, pushing, pulling — these simple functions can put employees at risk for back injuries if done improperly. In addition, back injuries can occur when employees are working in the cold, using a computer for extended periods or standing for long periods without a break. Slips and falls are also common causes of back injuries. The good news is that back injuries are very preventable. All industries, from agriculture to administration, have employees who are at risk. Here are some ways employees can avoid back injuries:

### *Workstations*

- Provide adjustable workstations and fit the workspace to the employee.
- Design computer workstations and accompanying keyboards that encourage a natural posture.

### *Lifting*

- Do not carry loads that are too heavy. Know your weight limits.
- Keep heavy materials close to the work area.
- Ensure that items to be lifted are stored at a level that is between hand and shoulder height.
- Avoid twisting your body when lifting materials.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.

### *Standing*

- Encourage employees to wear shoe insoles that cushion the foot.
- Provide cushioned floor mats at workstations.
- Offer sit/stand stools and foot rests so employees can shift their posture.

### *Reaching/awkward posture*

- Place needed tools or other items in front of employees, below shoulder height and as close to the employee as possible.
- Position items for the shortest arm reach to avoid over-stretching while reaching up or down.
- Position shared items to accommodate both taller and shorter employees.

### *Pushing/pulling*

- Do not push or pull loads that are too heavy. Again, know your weight limits.
- Ensure carts, dollies and hampers are in proper working order with wheels that run straight and smoothly.
- Push/pull items along a straight path. Avoid turns, stairs, doors and inclines (if possible).
- Clear all pathways of debris and ensure they have dry, even surfaces.

### *General*

- Provide regular break periods and encourage employees to stretch.
- Rotate employees to tasks that require different body movements.
- Regularly remind employees of safe working procedures. Conduct new hire training, as well as regularly scheduled safety training.

### *Resources*

- Pinnacol offers policyholders a free “Proper Lifting Techniques” poster to help prevent back injuries in the workplace. This poster is available in both English and Spanish. You can also order a free copy of the “Office Ergonomics” DVD to help you establish an effective office ergonomics program. To order these and other free materials, go to the Resources section of our Web site at [www.pinnacol.com](http://www.pinnacol.com).

If you have any questions, contact your Pinnacol marketing manager.

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