



Tailgate Safety Talk

Information You Can Use to Prevent Accidents & Injuries

Back Care: You Can Make a Difference

"Ouch! Why Did I Try To Lift That Much Weight On My Own?" Did you ever say that after you hoisted something heavy, or lifted from an awkward position? These incidents are well known causes of back strain, but you might not have considered other "underlying" factors that lead to back injury. Several conditions influence your "back health." The cause of most back problems is poor posture, loss of flexibility, stressful living/working habits and above all, a general decline in physical fitness. Surprised? You shouldn't be. When you "let yourself go," (and most of us do with age) the *first* thing to *go* can be back strength. Along with correct lifting techniques, we should also work on our overall physical condition.

Nutrition Is An Important Key To Staying Physically Fit! As we grow older, our metabolism slows down. To counteract this natural event, we have to eat the right types of food-and not too much of it or the pounds come on quickly! Now, what does nutrition have to do with a healthy back? For one thing, a healthy back is correctly balanced on your spine. With a "sway" back, that balance is lost-and those darned potbellies cause sway backs. Carrying around excess weight puts tremendous strain on back tissues, so lifting even a small extra load may cause an injury.

Exercise Plays An Important Role As Well. A form of exercise as simple as walking 30 minutes a day can raise your heart rate and burn enough calories to help keep you lean. Flexibility is another condition that changes as we grow older, if we don't work to retain it. It's true, as they say-"Use it or Lose it!" Without flexibility, we lose our body's full range of motion.

Then, when a sudden, physical demand takes a muscle or joint further than it's used to, the risk of injury is high. You can do stretching exercises every morning to keep yourself flexible and ready for the physical demands of work. After all, don't athletes warm up before a game to prevent injury?

Keep On Moving. Fixed positions or not moving *enough* can also cause back problems. Staying in a fixed position for too long can lead to muscle spasms. We feel it as stiffness, but by the time discomfort from "static" muscle contractions is experienced, low level tissue damage has begun. Take stretch breaks between long standing or sitting periods to improve circulation and prevent back strain.

Break Those Bad Habits. Poor body mechanics and bad lifting habits usually "trigger" a back injury-and are more likely to do so if overall physical condition is poor. Remember these techniques to help escape injury:

- Avoid using fast, jerking motions when lifting.
- Avoid bending and twisting at the same time.
- Avoid handling a load too far away! Keep the load close to your body.
- Use teamwork! If the load is too heavy, two persons should carry it.

Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.