

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Preventing Lower Back Pain

As many as 80 per cent of us will experience back pain at some time in our lives. Because this complaint is so prevalent, you might think it's something you have to endure, like the common cold. Not so. There are steps you can take to prevent injury – in particular, you can reduce, if not eliminate, the manual handling of materials at work. This goal can be achieved by:

- redesigning the work process
- having materials handling equipment do the work

Causes of lower back pain

The most common cause of lower back pain is overuse, which strains the bones of the spinal column and the tendons, muscles and other tissues that support the spine and allow it to function. Motions that appear harmless can strain and damage tissues if they are repeated hundreds or thousands of times daily. Other causes can include injuries, and disease or age-related changes that reduce or limit lower back function.



Research shows that persons who already have lower back pain and continue to perform work that involves lifting are especially at risk. But don't be fooled into thinking that only heavy loads are a problem. Lifting an object as light as a pencil from the floor can result in lower back pain if the lift involves twisting or an awkward body position. Another risk factor is excessive body weight, which places an extra load on the spine.



Other research findings

- Although people of all ages can have lower back pain, recent research shows that it occurs most often during the teenage years, with genetics being a strong determining factor.
- Lower back injuries at work occur most often in the morning. Researchers believe the tissues supporting the spinal column are at their most flexible early in the day, so they are more easily overextended or overused at that time.
- A lower back injury may not be noticed initially. Many people who are injured have stiffness and a reduced range of motion; pain may or may not be present. In many cases, the stiffness and pain go away over time without medical treatment.
- Maintaining near-normal activity levels and avoiding bed rest are key factors in recovery.

Resources



http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bcl005.pdf

Seven Myths About Back Pain




http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_bcl003.pdf


Back Care and Lifting, Part 3

Original article appeared in the May 2006 Occupational Health and Safety Magazine

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