

# MAFES Dawg Tracks



May 17, 2010

Back Safety - Lifting & Reaching



MISSISSIPPI STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Back injuries are listed in the “Top Ten” leading workplace injuries, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Back injuries account for 27 percent of all non-fatal injuries and illnesses involving days away from work. Our backs are a very sophisticated piece of machinery, made up of many muscles, nerves, bones and supporting tissues. And just like machinery, we must take proper care of our backs to keep them working. An injured back affects your ability to move your limbs, hips, legs, neck and head.

Back injuries will cause you a lot of pain, lost work days, and in many cases, physical therapy or even surgery. Anyone whose job involves stressful lifting and awkward postures are at risk for back injuries. Following are some tips that can help you keep your back in optimum condition:

## **While lifting:**

- Don't bend over an object you are lifting. Bend your knees, squatting in front of the object to reach it.
- Lift the object carefully and slowly, using your arm and leg muscles to lift and not pulling on your back.
- Keep your head up and look straight ahead while making the lift.
- While lifting, keep the object as close to your body as possible.
- Keep your abdominal muscles tight while making the lift.
- Use the exact same techniques when you put the object down.
- If the object is too big or too heavy to lift using these techniques, use mechanical assistance or get someone else to help.

## **When reaching for objects:**

- Do not reach for an object unless you're strong enough to lift it.
- Use a step ladder to reach objects over shoulder height.
- Avoid awkward stretches while reaching. These stress your back and could cause you to lose your balance.
- Don't depend on structure to support you (like shelves, racks, etc.) These could easily give way if you pull or tug on them.

Exercise is very important in keeping your back strong, healthy, and flexible. A properly exercised back is less likely to incur injury. If you aren't already on an exercise program, you should consult your doctor, health provider or other medical professional to check your medical condition and prescribe a program for you. The program will depend on your present physical condition and the type of work you perform.

Many companies are recommending that employees use back belts. Actually, they probably aren't very useful in our modes of operation. There are different schools of thought on the usefulness of the back belts. I've heard in seminars that back belts can make your back weaker, because the user becomes accustomed to them and they gradually weaken the back. The National Safety Council published a report from available scientific data stating that they neither condemn nor support the use of them to control lower back injuries. One thing for sure is that the belts are not a substitute for a comprehensive back injury prevention program.

In many cases, it has been stated that using the back belt gives the user a false sense of security. One may be tempted to lift loads that they otherwise wouldn't attempt. We need to remember that it's our back doing the work, not the belt.