



PREVENTING STRAINS AND SPRAINS

Strains and sprains account for most of our workplace injuries. These types of injuries are often caused by how we lift, lower, push, pull or carry materials in our jobs. They can also be caused by how we position ourselves to perform our work. These injuries can happen over a period or take only a quick moment and can take days or months to heal. Preventing strain and sprain injuries is a lot easier than correcting them once the damage is done. You can make material handling tasks less demanding by following a few simple rules:

- *Keep loads close to the body. If you have a load at arm's reach, it is 7 to 10 times heavier on your back than if it is kept closer.*
- *Correct lifting techniques involve bending at the knees and lifting with the powerful muscles in your legs, not your back.*
- *Never twist while lifting an object.*
- *When carrying a load, avoid bending or lifting upward unnecessarily. Keep as much of the load as possible at waist level.*

Many strains and sprains occur because of poor material handling. Workers lift things that weigh too much or they lift incorrectly. **Get help with heavy loads.** Do not try to move or lift an object you cannot handle. Break loads down into smaller parts or get help from a mechanical device such as pallet jacks or dollies. Also, ask for help from a coworker to lift heavy items. Learn to look at something and understand your own limitations and then acquire help in accordance with your needs.

Chronic strain due to an unchanging work position can, over time, weaken your back, arms, and shoulders. A vicious cycle develops when chronic strain continues; muscles become less able to withstand strenuous activity and grow more prone to injury of all kinds. Change your working positions frequently. **Stretch during the day to increase your flexibility.** Take body relaxation breaks by letting your shoulders and neck muscles go limp; swivel your head or arms or flex your hands and fingers.

Take care of your whole body with exercise, proper posture, a sensible diet and adequate rest. If your muscles or ligaments have weakened over time from lack of exercise or age, you are more apt to get a strain or sprain than if you are physically fit.



Employee discussion... Have employees to discuss potential sprain and strain operations in their area. Have any employees ever experienced a strain or a sprain on the job? What are some ways to prevent those injuries from having occurred? Are there any current tasks that need to be evaluated? Remind employees that the potential for strains and sprains exist every day in their jobs.

