WORKPLACE SAFETY

Workplace Safety

If you are injured or exposed to a dangerous substance on the job, stop what you are doing; report the injury or exposure to your supervisor; seek medical attention if needed; and complete an employee accident report.

Injury Prevention

Accident hazards such as wet floors, stairway obstructions, and faulty ladders should be reduced. Wet-floor hazards can be reduced by proper housekeeping procedures such as marking wet areas, cleaning up spills immediately, cleaning only one side of a passageway at a time, keeping halls and stairways clear, and providing good lighting for all halls and stairwells. Use the handrail on stairs, to avoid undue speed, and to maintain an unobstructed view of the stairs ahead of them, even if that means requesting help to manage a bulky load.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is a science that designs equipment and work tasks to fit the worker. The goal is to prevent worker injury. If you have pain, tingling, or numbness associated with a specific activity, reevaluate how you are performing the task to assure you are doing it correctly. Consult your supervisor or employee health provider to have an ergonomic evaluation of your work. There may be equipment and methods available to reduce the risk of injury.

Injuries and illness that affects muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, or spinal discs are known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). Injuries can result from cumulative trauma and repetitive strain, where small injuries over time build up until one more injury triggers a debilitating MSD. The following tasks have a high risk of cumulative trauma and repetitive strains:

Repetitive activity (typing)

Contact stress (hammering)

Twisting while lifting or carrying

Pulling or dragging

Sitting or standing in one position for a long time

Reaching above your shoulder

Lifting:
While stooping low
Heavy objects
Unwieldy objects
An object that is positioned far from your body
Frequent lifting without rest between lifts

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Back Safety

The primary approach to preventing back injury involves reducing manual lifting and other load-handling tasks that are biomechanically stressful. The secondary approach is to train workers how to perform stressful tasks while minimizing the biomechanical forces on their backs, and how to maintain flexibility and strengthen the back and abdominal muscles. To prevent back injury, workers should (DHHS, 1998):

Use tools to avoid lifting when possible:
Lifting devices
Slide boards
Shower chairs
Gait belts
Use proper lifting techniques
Keep your back in its normal upright position when lifting
Keep your head and shoulders up, and tighten your abdominal muscles when lifting
Bend at the knees, not at the waist
Get a good grip and slightly bend your elbows
Lift with your legs in a smooth even motion, not with your back
Bear the weight with your arms and legs, not your back
Bear the weight as close to your body as possible
Pivot on your feet to change direction, do not twist
Lower an object by widening your stance and bending your knees
Don't reach higher than your shoulders to lift
Limit the number of lifts per day
Request help. When in doubt about whether a task may strain the back, a worker should request help.
Back exercises can be used to strengthen the back muscles and help prevent back injuries. A physician or physical therapist should be consulted.

The benefit of using back belts is undetermined. The belt may lead to a false sense of security and a failure to use proper lifting techniques. This can lead to injuries.
Patient transfers are particularly hazardous for healthcare professionals. The following special points should be emphasized to prevent back injuries during transfers.

Obtain lifting equipment as applicable
Do not do a manual transfer alone
Position equipment and furniture effectively (for example, move a wheelchair next to the bed) and remove obstacle
Communicate the plan of action to the patient and other workers to ensure that the transfer will be smooth and without sudden, unexpected moves
Use a wide balanced stance
Ensure good footing for the patient if applicable (patients should wear slippers that provide good traction)
Maintain eye contact and communication with patient. Be alert for trouble signs
Record any problems on the patient's chart so that other workers will know how to cope with difficult transfers. Note the need for any special equipment, such as a lift.