



Safety & Risk Office 5-Minute Safety Talk No. 1 – Saving Your Back

Note to Supervisor: This 5-Minute Safety Talk (in some places, it might be called a Toolbox Talk or a Tailgate Talk) is designed not only to communicate important safety information to your employees, but also to be given to them by you, which will hopefully reinforce the message and let them know your expectations for safety. You can use the text below as a script to be rendered verbatim or just as talking points to be stated in your own words. Please also complete the attendance listing on the last page and send it to Safety & Risk, Mail Stop 66.

Lifting an object, whether it is a paper clip on the floor or a box of office supplies on a shelf, is something that we do every day. And, because it is something we do so often, we tend to do it without thinking, or at least we do until we strain a muscle, or worse, hurt our backs. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, back injuries account for **one of every five** injuries and illnesses in the workplace.

SOME TIPS TO SAVE YOUR BACK:

1. Size up the load. Look it over, decide if you can handle it alone or if you will need help. When in doubt, **ask for help**. Moving an object that is too heavy for one person to lift safely is not worth strained and sore back muscles.
 - Never try to lift an item weighing over 50 pounds by yourself.
 - Always use mechanical equipment like a dolly to lift heavy objects, if at all possible.
 - Can you slide it instead of lifting it? **Push**, don't pull.
 - Is the load height located inside your "safe lifting zone"?
 - The safe lifting zone is between knees and shoulders. If the load is below knee level – bend your knees and lift with your legs. If the load is above your shoulders – use a stool or ladder. Better yet, rearrange the contents on the shelves so that heavier and more frequently needed items are placed on the mid-level shelves.
 - If you are not in good physical shape, enough to handle the load, get help.
2. Size up the area. Check the surroundings in which you will be handling the object. Make sure the path is clear of obstructions and you are facing the direction of the travel prior to lifting.
3. Limber up before attempting the lift – do some stretching exercises.
4. Plant your feet firmly – get a stable base. Good foot position allows you to keep your balance and use your leg muscles. The larger muscles of your legs are much

more powerful and durable than your relatively weaker back muscles. Let your leg muscles do the majority of the work -- they can handle it.

5. When lifting:

- Bend at your knees – not your waist – to reach the object.
- Get a good grip on the object – use both hands.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles to support your spine.
- Keep the load close to your body. Think of your arms and the load as a pry bar. The further the load is from your body, the longer the bar and the more force it will place on your back. By keeping the load close to your body, you reduce the amount of stress placed on your lower back.
- Keep the back as straight as possible while lifting.
- Lift with your leg muscles, not your back. Push straight up, like an elevator.
- Lift steadily and smoothly without jerking.
- Breathe. If you must hold your breath to lift the object, it is too heavy – **GET HELP.**
- **Do not twist your upper body** while carrying the load. Twisting compounds the stresses and forces of lifting and carrying an object. It affects your center of balance. Once you have established a good foundation with your feet, use them to turn and change direction.

6. Practice team lifting when lifting with someone else.

- Teamwork is critical when someone is helping you lift and carry a load. Both of you should discuss and decide, in advance, how you're going to handle the load.
- Decide and communicate your route.
- The person in the position to observe and direct the other should be the leader.
- Lifting, carrying and lowering should be done in unison.
- Communicate with your lifting partner; let him or her know what's happening.
- If you feel that your grip is slipping, warn your partner. Set the load down if possible. Let it fall if not – don't try to stop it.

Following these lifting tips will help you to prevent injury to your back.

5-Minute Safety Talk No. 1 – Saving Your Back Attendance List

Presenter: _____ Date/Time: _____/_____/_____

Printed Name	Campus	Signature
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Send to the Safety & Risk Office, Mail Stop # 66, when completed.