

Ouch, what was that pop?

Mike Peeler

New Jersey Office of Weights and Measures

Ouch my back, my knee, my neck. Sounds like a whiplash commercial, but in actuality, it's what can happen to you if you don't lift properly. Simple little things like lifting, twisting, or bending incorrectly can really cause some serious damage to your body. For example, lifting a 30lb weight kit into your vehicle incorrectly could possibly cause a snapped tendon or a torn muscle. Other injuries that can be associated with improper lifting techniques are tendinitis, herniated disk, pinched nerves, muscle strains and low back injuries. In NIST HB 133, Section 1.6, Health and Safety, it states "This handbook cannot address all of the health and safety issues associated with its use. The inspector is responsible for determining the appropriate safety and health practices and procedures before starting an inspection."

Why are lifting ergonomics important? OSHA reports back injuries account for one in five workplace injuries, and 75% of workplace related back injuries occur during a lifting task. Also, per NCWM's Safety Surveys, between 2016 – 2019, 72.6% of reported Weights and Measures injuries were due to lifting, twisting, bending, slips and falls. Before you lift, let's go over using proper lifting techniques:

PLAN AHEAD

- Know what you are lifting and how you will lift it
- Be aware of the weight of the object
- Determine whether or not it's safe to lift on your own
- Make sure the work area is flat, dry and clear of debris
- Use lift assists, dolly, cart, hand truck or hoist

CHECK YOUR PATHWAY

- Make sure the lift pathway is clear
- Remove any tripping hazards or debris
- Check for any wet or slick surfaces

GET HELP WHEN NEEDED

- When lifting awkward or heavy items, utilize a two-person lift
- Make sure you lift at the same time and keep the load level

You've probably heard, "lift with your knees, not with your back." But what does it mean? It means you should never bend forward to lift a heavy object. Instead, you should squat, secure the load, and stand by straightening your legs while keeping your back straight or slightly arched.

Safe lifting involves:

- Standing as close to the load as possible
- Planting your feet shoulder-width apart with one foot slightly ahead of the other
- Bending at the hips and knees only until you're deep in a squatting position
- Keeping your head up and straight with your shoulders back to keep your back straight
- Holding the load close to your body at waist height
- Engaging your core muscles as you push against the ground and straighten your legs

Here are a few essential don'ts to keep in mind for good lifting ergonomics:

- Never twist your torso while lifting. Stay "nose between your toes."
- Never lift a heavy item above shoulder level.
- Never carry a load that obstructs your vision.
- Never hold your breath while lifting, moving, and setting the load

Keep in mind that the most dangerous lifting tasks are repetitive and for sustained periods. You need to monitor your exertion level and take a break before you become too tired. The temptation to hurry, lift and hope you 'get away with it' is a daily threat. Slow down just a little. Think of the consequences before you act. And lift safely.

