

## Know the Facts About Backs

To help prevent back injuries, you must understand what causes them. Contrary to popular belief, anyone can be at risk for back injury, not only workers who lift heavy objects. Your physical health has a lot to do with protection against back injury.

**Poor body mechanics.** The way your body adjusts to keep its balance can be upset if you sit or stand in an unnatural position, twist abruptly or awkwardly, or lift something incorrectly.

**Poor muscle tone.** Weak, under-exercised muscles rob the back of its support and increase the chance of injury.

**Extra weight.** Excess weight can exaggerate the curve of the spine and strain the back.

**High heels.** These deepen the curve of the lower back and force the pelvis to make up for this by tilting backward.

**Personal factors.** Stress, anxiety and depression can cause muscles to tighten and throw your back into a spasm.

### Don't Back Down on Fitness

The harder you work, the less likely you will be to have a back injury. Take the following into consideration:

Perform tasks to strengthen the appropriate muscles and reduce the likelihood of injury. Avoid manual tasks that your body isn't used to.

Exercise the abdominal and leg muscles. The stronger they are, the less your back has to work.

### Watch your every move

The best way to avoid back injury is to pay attention any time you lift, carry, reach or push. While everyone has a favorite lifting technique, some basic rules apply:

Decide whether you can lift the object alone or will need help.

Keep the object or load close to you.

If you have to squat, keep your back straight. Bend at the waist, hips or knees. Never lock your knees.

Get a firm footing and keep your feet parted, one alongside and one behind the object. Your rear foot will help in the upward thrust of the lift.

Center the object as well as your body weight. Let your whole body bear the weight, not just your back.

Let your legs do the work. Your leg muscles are several times stronger than any other muscle in your body.

Grip the object firmly with the palms of your hands around the corners of the object. Keep your arms and elbows tucked into the side of your body.

Do not arch your back. This makes the nerve roots open to pinching and can cause strains in weaker muscles.

Avoid twisting your back. If you need to lift and then turn, point one foot in the direction you want to go before you lift.

Warm up before you lift. Limber muscles are less likely to snap or tear.

Always push, do not pull, your load.

### Ergonomics to the Rescue

Ergonomic experts try to find the easiest way to do work to help relieve stress on your body, especially your back. Small improvements can greatly reduce your chances of back injury. For example, if you bend over to retrieve a part from a bin, place the bin at a higher level. This way, you do not have to bend so much. Try to reduce or avoid repetitive motions. Muscle fatigue can lead to over-exertion, which is responsible for one-fourth of all work

injuries. Take a break or temporarily change tasks to regain strength.

### **Be Careful While Carrying**

Before you start carrying a load, plan where you will walk. The path should be clear of obstacles so that you don't slip or fall. If equipment such as a dolly is available, use it. Take extra care on platforms, ramps, and loading docks. If you can't see in front of you, get help.

When you carry a load, remember to balance it. Try to divide smaller loads into two and carry them at your sides, one in each hand. Ask for help if you have to carry a heavy load. Never carry a load backward; it can throw off your balance.

### **Within reach**

Keep supplies you use regularly at an easy-to-reach height. If you need to reach for an item, use a ladder or a step stool. To lift something from the floor to above waist level, carefully lift the load halfway, then change your grip to lift the item higher.

As always, your NJSBAIG Loss Control Representative is available to provide training at no cost to Member Districts. Please call Marty Kalbach at 609-386-6060 extension 3024 to make arrangements.♥

*National Safety Council*

## Workers' Compensation Accidents 7/1/2007—12/31/2007

Personnel	Frequency % of Claims		Cause	Frequency % of Claims
Educator	34.9		Fall Same Level	21.9
Custodian	20.3		Special Education Acting Out	17.1
Educator Aide	18.6		Overexertion	14.9
Office Worker	5.3		Struck By	13.7
Educator Athletic	4.2		Struck Against	11.3
Trades	3.3		Fall Different Level	7.0
Cafeteria	3.2		Caught Between	2.8
Bus Driver	2.8		Student Altercation	2.6
Grounds	2.1		Internal/Sudden	2.6
Other	5.3		Other	6.1

As usual the teachers led the way in accident frequency (34.9). The custodians were second (20.3), but they only account for approximately 7% of the work hours. Therefore, the custodial rate of accident frequency is higher. Both teachers and custodians should be included in your safety program.♥

*By Marty Kalbach  
NJSBAIG Loss Control Manager*

Claims Corner Article:

## Occupational Injury Disease Claims

Occupational injury and/or disease claims are typically filed by employees as a result of a long standing injury or illness. These employees believe their condition is somehow related to their employment. An example would be minor knee injury with no surgery. A few years later symptoms increase to the point where surgery is needed. They feel the job started it and the ongoing job duties accelerated the condition. Another example would be an employee who develops breathing problems or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). The employee may ultimately be convinced the condition is related to their work environment, and allege possible mold exposure or lack of clean air.

These claims can sometimes involve an exposure period of 20 or more years. In that time frame, some school districts may have been covered by numerous different insurance companies. When you receive an Occupational Claim Petition, please be sure to notify all insurance companies involved for the entire period of exposure. This will assure that you are adequately protected and defended. Please be sure that you look at the bottom portion of the petition for the "Date of Accident" box, which should have the dates listed which they are claiming.

If you have any questions concerning the above, please contact Nancy Spector, extension 3008 or Connie Rogers, extension 3015.♥

*Nancy Spector*  
*NJSBAIG Claim Supervisor*

## *How Your Heart Calls for Help*

If you pictured a heart attack, what would it look like? Images of clutching your chest and keeling over from sudden intense pain might come to mind first. But a heart attack does not always look like an emergency. The signs of many heart attacks can be subtle. Some start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort. Knowing these **more common waning signs** could save your life:

Most heart attacks involve **chest discomfort**, which may feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of the chest. The discomfort lasts for more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back.

**Other upper body discomfort** may include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.

**Shortness of breath** can occur before or during chest discomfort.

**Other symptoms** include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, vomiting or lightheadedness. A heart attack can also easily be mistaken for severe indigestion.

Heart attack signs may differ for women. Although the most common symptom for women is chest pain or discomfort, women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

**Don't wait.** For women or men, experts say starting treatment in the first hour of a heart attack is critical. If you even think you're experiencing symptoms, don't take chances. Seek emergency medical treatment right away.♥

*TopHealth*

## Winter Driving

Dealing with snow, ice, and slippery conditions on a daily basis can be stressful and frustrating to the point where you just get tired of coping. The time is ripe for road rage, particularly when every day seems to present a new driving challenge. If you find yourself easily angered or at the end of your rope, take a minute to review these tips:

**Allow enough time.** Get used to allowing extra time to get where you need to go, especially if you know road conditions may not be good. Also allow some extra time for the driver who drives extra slowly when conditions are marginal. Everyone's comfort level is different when they're driving in poor conditions, and what seems like easy driving to you may be hair-raising for someone else. If you allow extra time, you won't have the added worry of being late to your destination because of a slow driver.

**Don't try to "teach" other drivers.** Like it or not, you can't teach other drivers how to drive, no matter how poorly they are doing it. While you may want to lob a few choice words their way, it's better to treat others as you would like to be treated: with courtesy and respect.

**Watch your own road rage.** If someone cuts you off or is driving in an unsafe manner during slippery conditions, put some distance between yourself and that driver. Responding angrily will only make matters worse. If you inadvertently cut someone off, a gesture of apology, like a friendly wave and a look that says "I'm sorry" might diffuse potential trouble. Everyone makes a stupid driving mistake every once in a while. If you stop to remember mistakes that you have made, you can be more tolerant of other's mistakes.

**Eliminate anxiety.** Being prepared eliminates some of the anxiety of traveling in poor conditions. Have a cell phone with you, and keep emergency equipment in the vehicle such as a shovel, blankets, first aid kit, battery cables, sand or salt, and flares.♥