**February 6, 2006** Volume XIV, Issue 3

SAFETY AND THE SUPERVISOR

STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS FOR THE SAFETY CONSCIOUS ORGANIZATION

# Back Safety

## Safety Meeting Presentation

### A Quick Look At Back Safety Basics

The back is a pretty fragile thing – yet most of us ask a lot of it. Many scientists say the human spine was never intended to be in an upright position and merely standing puts an incredible amount of pressure on the back.

The human spine, or backbone, is made up of a series of small bones called vertebrae. The vertebrae are stacked on top of each other, forming a column. Between each vertebra is a cushion called a disc. The vertebrae are held together by ligaments, and muscles are attached to the vertebrae by bands of tissue called tendons.

Openings in the vertebrae line up to form a long, hollow canal. The spinal cord runs through this canal from the base of the brain. Nerves from the spinal cord branch out and leave the spine through the spaces between the vertebrae.

The lower part of the back holds most of the body's weight. Even a minor problem with the bones, muscles, ligaments or tendons in the is area can cause pain when you bend, stand or move around. Sometimes a problem with a disc can pinch or irritate a nerve from the spinal cord, causing pain that runs down the leg, below the knee. This is called sciatica.

It's not as if the human back is made of steel parts fused together to form powerful bonds. Actually, it's almost the opposite. It is no surprise that eight out of 10 adults will suffer a low back problem at some point in their life. In fact, most of us will have more than one episode of acute low back problems. Sometimes the problem is chronic and can be debilitating.

### What Causes Back Pain?

Many of the common causes of back pain are related to ergonomics. Those who are in poor physical condition or who do work that includes heavy labor or long periods of sitting or standing are at greater risk for low back problems. These people also take longer to recover.

The best way to prevent low back problems is to stay fit. For example, heavy lifting is a common source of injuries and pain. In fact, the lifting does not even have to be all that heavy to cause problems. In any case, always follow safe lifting techniques. Here are a few reminders:

- Keep a wide stance and make sure of your footing.
- Lift steadily with your legs, not your back.
- Keep your head up and your back straight, bending at the knees.
- Point your feet in the direction you plan to move. Do not twist.
- Keep the load close to your body.
- Put the load down by squatting, not bending over.
- If you are using a cart or dolly, push it rather than pulling it.

Here are a few other things you can do to keep your back safe and pain free:

- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- Make sure your work surface is at a comfortable height.
- Use a chair with a good lower back support that may recline slightly.
- If you must sit for long periods, try resting your feet on the floor or on a low stool, whichever is more comfortable.
- If you must stand for long periods, try resting one foot on a low stool. Rotate feet regularly.
- If you must drive long distances, try using a pillow or rolled –up towel behind the small of your back. Also, be sure to stop often and walk around for a few minutes.
- If you have trouble sleeping, try sleeping on your back with a pillow under your knees or sleep on your side with your knees bent and a pillow between them.

Remember, if you are in poor physical condition, if you're doing heavy labor or sitting or standing for long periods, you are at greater risk for low back problems. Keep this in mind and take appropriate precautions.

Thanks for your attention. Have a safe day.