

## Safety Tips

# Lifting Safely to Help Prevent Back Injuries

Whether you work in the classroom, in an office, or in the area of custodial services and maintenance, it is likely that you lift objects or students in the course of your day. This can result in back injuries. Most back injuries occur gradually over time, not from a single stressful event. Once the back is weakened by injury, it is prone to reinjury—starting a vicious and painful cycle. But back injuries can be avoided through good posture, proper lifting techniques, and exercise. Safe lifting isn't a question of strength—it's a commitment to lifting correctly, every time you pick up or move something.

### Safe lifting starts before you even pick up the load:

- Choose the flattest, straightest route, even if it's a little longer. Avoid walking on slippery, uneven surfaces.
- Clear the path. Move any objects you might trip over.
- Clear a space around the object before lifting it.
- Test every load before you lift to see if you can move it by yourself or if you should get some help. Push the object lightly with your hands or feet to see how easily it moves. Remember, a small size does not always mean a light load.
- If the object is too big, heavy or awkward, do not carry it alone. Mechanical assistance may be necessary (such as a cart, dolly, forklift or wheelbarrow). If a two-person lift is called for, it works best if both people are about the same height; one person is in charge of giving signals and saying when to move where; both people lift and raise at the same time; both people keep the load at the same level while



carrying it, moving smoothly together; both people unload at the same time.

- Check the object you'll be carrying and make sure the weight is stable and distributed evenly, and that there is nothing sharp sticking out.
- Look for places you can stop and rest.
- Make sure the unloading area is clear.
- Keep your back flexible with daily stretching and exercises for your back, abdomen and legs. Warm up before you lift. (See exercises on back of page).

### To lift safely, follow these steps:

- Make sure you stand close to the load, that your stance is wide, and that you get a good grip on the object.
- Keep your arms and elbows tucked in, and your weight centered.
- Bend your knees—not your waist. Keep your feet flat and let your legs—not your back—do the work. Remain relaxed and upright, contract your stomach muscles and maintain the natural curves of your back. Make sure you can see where you are going. Move slowly, with small steps.
- Face the object and lift straight up, slowly and smoothly. **Don't twist your body.** Move your feet—taking small steps to turn your body in the direction you need to be in.

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- Push, don't pull, heavy loads.
- Don't lift objects over your head. Try to pick up and drop off objects at waist height.
- If you are lifting or lowering something from a high place, ***never climb on a chair*** to reach the object. Instead, use a step ladder, step stool or platform—or get help.
- To unload, face the spot you have chosen and lower the load slowly.
- Don't rely on a back belt to protect you. It hasn't been proven that back belts can protect you from back injury.

## A Sampling of Exercises for a Strong Back

**Although these exercises are recommended, they may not be appropriate for all people.**

**If you are experiencing back pain of any kind, please consult with your physician before beginning any exercises.**

### Pelvic Tilt

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Slowly tighten your stomach and buttocks as you press your lower back into the floor. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

### Bent-Knee/Half Sit-Up

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Cross your arms across your chest and slowly raise your shoulders, using your stomach muscles. (Do not stretch with your neck or arms.) Hold for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

### Knee to Chest Raise

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Grip your knees with both hands and pull your knees gently to you chest. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax. Repeat 5 to 10 times. This may also be done one knee at a time, with the other leg remaining with the knee bent and the foot flat on the floor.

**DISCLAIMER:** This Safety Tips Sheet is being provided for educational purposes only and addresses common reasons for accidents. It is not intended to imply fault or negligence on the part of any employee. It is the law, policy, and intent of Nassau BOCES to provide a safe and healthful workplace. However, the basic responsibility for safety and health rests with all BOCES employees. The measures contained herein can help employees to ensure their safety.

Although the information and recommendations contained in this Safety Tips Sheet have been compiled from sources believed to be reliable, the Office of the Nassau BOCES Safety Coordinator makes no guarantee as to the correctness, sufficiency or completeness of such information or recommendations. Other or additional safety measures may be required under particular circumstances.

**For more information call the Safety Hotline 396-2400.**

**Remember, by learning how to lift safely, including planning and practice, you'll avoid injury and help protect your back.**