

Employees and volunteers are an essential part of every organization. In an effort to ensure that your workers do not experience back pain or other injuries while they are providing service, care, and education are essential. The following information provides helpful tips about preventing back pain and injury that should be shared with everyone working in your facility.

## Causes of Back Pain

The most common cause of back pain is an injury to the back. Some injuries that can trigger back pain include tripping, falling a short distance, improper lifting, or excessive twisting of the spine. More severe back injuries occur from falls from significant heights, direct blows to the back or the top of the head, a high-energy fall onto the buttocks, or a penetrating injury.

Although pain is often caused by an injury to one or more of the structures of the back, it could develop from a variety of factors. Factors that increase the risk for back pain are listed below. If you possess any of the listed factors, extra care should be taken when performing tasks.

## Factors That Increase Back Pain Risk

- ❑ Advancing age.
- ❑ Being male.
- ❑ Having a family history of back pain.
- ❑ Pregnancy and childbearing. (Two or more full-term pregnancies triple a woman's risk of osteoporosis and potential collapse of the vertebrae.)
- ❑ Spine problems that have been present since birth (congenital).
- ❑ Degenerative diseases of the spine, such as osteoporosis.

## Activities That Increase Risk of Injury

- ❑ Youth field trips and retreats, such as skiing, snowboarding, sledding, snowmobiling, tobogganing, or wall climbing.  
**Example:** If you plan a ski trip, it is important to educate participants about how to prevent back injuries while skiing.
- ❑ Work-related activities that require repeated lifting, bending, or twisting of the back.  
**Example:** Childcare workers often have to bend and squat down to a child's eye level to talk with them. This movement can cause added stress on the back.

## Preventing Back Pain

### Factors That Decrease Back Pain Risk

- ❑ Exercising regularly.
- ❑ Avoiding long periods of sitting, lifting or pulling heavy objects, frequent bending or twisting, heavy physical exertion, repetitive motions, and exposure to constant vibration, such as driving.
- ❑ Stopping smoking. A smoker's risk of low back pain is 1.5 to 2.5 times greater than that of a nonsmoker's. Nicotine may impair the availability of nutrients to the discs, making them more susceptible to injury.
- ❑ Losing weight. Obesity (weighing more than 20 percent of your ideal body weight) increases the risk for back pain.
- ❑ Practicing good posture.
- ❑ Stopping chronic coughing.

### Activities That Decrease Risk of Injury

#### *Exercise*

- ❑ **Build abdominal (ab) strength.** To provide optimum back stability, you need a strong rectus abdominis (the ab muscle that runs down your front), strong obliques (the side muscles), and strong transverse abs (the deep lateral ab muscles that work with the obliques).  
  
To strengthen all of these muscles, try doing sit-ups. To do so, lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat. Clasp your hands behind your head. Raise your head and shoulders together, rotating to one side as you lift off the floor. (Don't pull on your head/neck.) Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Lower, and repeat on the other side. Work up to 10 repetitions on each side. (Exhale on the exertion up; inhale as you go back down.)
- ❑ **Build side muscle support.** In an effort to help your back last longer during activity without fatiguing, it is important to have muscular endurance. The following side-bridge exercise boosts endurance in spine supporting muscles:  
  
Lie on your side with your knees bent. Bend your lower arm, and lift your torso, hips, and thighs off the floor, so only your forearm and lower legs touch the floor. Keep your spine and neck straight. Hold for five to 15 seconds. Lower, and repeat on the other side. Work up to holding each side for 30 to 60 seconds. (Don't hold your breath.)

- ❑ **Go easy in the morning.** During the night, the discs in your back fill with fluid, making your spine tight and stiff in the early morning hours and increasing your risk for injury. If you will be participating in activities early in the morning that could cause stress on your back, do simple warm up exercises for 15 minutes before the activity to allow some of that fluid to disperse.

### Practice Safe Lifting

To avoid injuring the discs of your lower back, follow these guidelines for lifting:

- ❑ Lift with your legs and not your back by squatting and bending your knees. Rise slowly.
- ❑ Try to avoid situations in which you must lift by bending forward at the waist.
- ❑ Keep your upper back straight while maintaining a slight arch in your lower back.
- ❑ Keep what you are lifting as close to your body as possible (near the navel is recommended).
- ❑ Never lift a heavy object above shoulder level.
- ❑ Avoid turning or twisting your body while holding a heavy object. Use your feet to change direction, taking small steps.
- ❑ Test every load before you lift by pushing the object lightly with your hands or feet to see how easily it moves. If items are, or appear to be, heavy, ask a co-worker to help you, or use a dolly or forklift if you can.
- ❑ Make sure the weight of the object is balanced.
- ❑ Pace yourself. Take small breaks if you are lifting a number of heavy items.
- ❑ Make sure you have enough room to lift safely. Clear a space around the object before picking it up.
- ❑ Don't rely on a back belt to protect you. It hasn't been proven that back belts can protect you from back injury.

By following these suggestions, you will have a greater chance of keeping your back muscles strong as you age or participate in worship activities that could cause stress on your back. For further information about preventing back pain and injury, visit <http://health.msn.com/>,