

# Tool Box Talk

## Back Safety

The back is one of the strongest anatomical structures of the body. Despite back pain being common and causing some people considerable pain, serious or permanent damage is rare. Heavy lifting, repetitive movements and sitting at a desk all day can weaken the back.

Pain can occur anywhere along your spine from the neck down. Pain can arise from many structures in your back, including the bones (vertebrae), the joints between the vertebrae, the discs that serve as cushions, ligaments, muscles and nerves.

### Back Pain

Several factors contribute to back pain or injury at work:

- Force – Exerting too much force on your back by lifting and moving heavy objects.
- Repetition – Repeating movements, especially those that involve twisting or rotating your spine.
- Inactivity – An inactive job or desk job can cause back pain, especially if you have poor posture or sit in a chair with inadequate back support.
- Other factors that contribute to back pain can include aging, poor physical condition or obesity.

### Reporting

If you injure your back at work in Saskatchewan, it is important to take immediate steps to ensure your health and protect your rights.

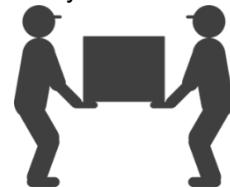
First, report the injury to your employer as soon as possible. Under Saskatchewan's Workers' Compensation Act, you must notify your employer within 72 hours of the injury occurring.

Seek medical attention promptly, even if the injury seems minor, as some back injuries may not show symptoms immediately. A healthcare professional can assess the severity of the injury and provide appropriate treatment. Be sure to inform the medical provider that the injury occurred at work, as this documentation will be necessary for any workers' compensation claims.

Additionally, keep detailed records of the incident, including the date, time, location and how the injury occurred, as well as any witnesses present.

### Prevent Back Injuries

- Think Twice Lift Once – Bend at your knees and lift with your legs. Keep feet shoulder-width apart with one foot slightly behind the other. Tighten stomach and buttocks muscles. Hold the object close to your body and do not twist when lifting. Make sure your route is clear.
- Use mechanical lifting aids where possible or **employ a team lift**.
- Combine aerobic exercise, such as swimming or walking, with exercises that strengthen and stretch your back muscles and abdomen.
- Exercises that increase balance and strength also decrease your risk of falling and injuring your back.
- Eat a healthy diet – Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D. These nutrients prevent osteoporosis.
- Pay attention to posture, both standing and sitting. If you sit for a prolonged period, change position, or periodically get up and walk around or stretch.



### Stretching

Incorporate regular stretching into your daily routine to improve flexibility, strengthen core muscles and enhance overall posture. Focus on stretches that target the lower back, hamstrings, hip flexors and abdominal muscles. These areas play a significant role in supporting the spine.

For example, gentle stretches like the cat-cow stretch, seated forward bends or pelvic tilts can help maintain spinal mobility and relieve tension. Additionally, dynamic stretches, such as leg swings or torso twists, can be beneficial before starting physically demanding tasks to warm up the muscles and increase blood flow.

Stretch slowly and avoid overextending. Sudden or forceful movements can cause strain. Pair stretching with proper lifting techniques, ergonomic adjustments and regular breaks. This helps minimize the risk of back injuries and promotes long-term musculoskeletal health.