

UC Davis/Monthly Safety Spotlight

November 2009: Strains & Sprains, Back Health and Body Mechanics

Poster of the Month

"Don't Risk It!"

Stretching just a little too high to reach that box on the top shelf -- the dangers of strains and sprains are highlighted in this month's Safety Spotlight poster. Print out the pdf file and share this colorful safety awareness tool with your staff.

[Download Poster File](#)

Safety Quiz

Are you a good body mechanic? We're talking about your body this time, not that of your car.

[Click here](#) to see how your answers compare.

Video Links

The first of this month's videos provides a concise overview of the human back. The second video focuses on safe lifting practices that help prevent back injuries:

[Back Safety Video](#)

[Lifting Safety Video](#)

Contest Question



Coffee for Your Thoughts!

[Click here](#) to answer this month's question to qualify for a Starbucks gift card.

Who's Got Your Back?

Your back: you walk upright because of it. Your mobility and strength depend on it. Our culture is filled with expressions that celebrate its unique nature: "Put your back into it!" "Show some backbone!"

Despite its importance to our health and quality of life, the welfare of this delicate and complex physical mechanism is often taken for granted. A moment's lapse in judgment can result in serious back problems and a lifetime of pain and impaired function. Incorrect lifting technique, overloading and overstressing the back, or minor stresses that are repeated over time can all result in major injury. Once the damage is done, recovery can be long and difficult and in many cases it is not possible to fully restore the back's strength and function. The time to consider your back's health is before an injury happens. Making good decisions about lifting, movement and repetitive actions, both at work and at home, will help prevent future injury.

Is it Really That Bad?

"Anyone who hasn't seen the effects of a back injury first hand would be shocked to see how bad it can be," says Bob Wachter, Injury Prevention Specialist, UC Davis Occupational Health; "The back is so critical to our health that an injury can have severe consequences. It's unfortunate that some of the people who take the best care of their backs are those who have had an injury and know what's at stake." Serious back injuries can result in:

- ◆ Intense pain
- ◆ Days or months in bed
- ◆ Inability to work, play or even sit up and read
- ◆ Lengthy, painful physical therapy, medications and their side effects
- ◆ Impact on family relationships
- ◆ Impact on work relationships and long-term career possibilities

Find Out if Your Back Could be Vulnerable

Answer the following five questions to see how well you're caring for your back.

1. Are you in good physical shape?

Regular exercise strengthens muscles and improves flexibility, making you less likely to sustain injury. Keeping your weight down also contributes to better back health.

2. Do you have an ergonomically correct workplace?

Back, neck and eye position, chair and workspace height, location of frequently used tools, and other factors determine ergonomics. Be sure you and your workplace are compatibly aligned, and take a quick break every half-hour to move and stretch.

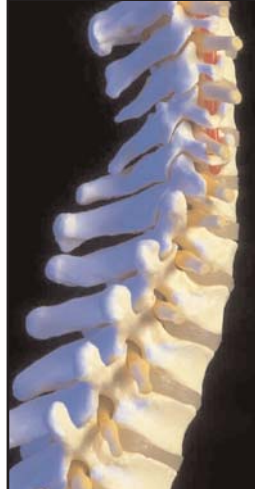
3. Do you follow the correct safety procedures when lifting or moving objects?

Don't try to lift things that are too heavy for you. Bend your knees and keep your spine straight rather than bending at the waist, and don't twist and reach when lifting. Be sure the path ahead is clear, and don't let the objects you're carrying interfere with your vision.

4. Do you stop and think before starting a project?

Practice good Personal Risk Management before you start to work. Are you assigned or authorized to do

Your spine is the primary information highway for your entire body. It serves important basic functions, including supporting the body, protecting the spinal cord, and providing flexibility for bending and rotating.



Your spinal cord is a conduit for millions of nerve fibers essential to sensation, movement and basic life functions. It's protected by the vertebrae of your back. Because your spine is a delicate structure, you will experience pain whenever you strain, sprain or in some way injure your back.

Safety Links

Easy links to services, programs and free advice available to you through the Safety Services Division.

- Principles of Safety
- SafetyNets
- Safety Signals Newsletter
- Departmental Safety Coordinator resources

Feedback, Please!

Your feedback is welcome! [Click here](#) to help us make this site more useful by providing your suggestions and comments.

this kind of task? Is it something that should be done by more than one person, or using a mechanical device? Are you unnecessarily putting yourself in harm's way?

5. Who would suffer if your back were injured?

You, your friends, family and community would all be paying the price if you are injured. Don't take the risk when safe work processes make the job easier, protect your health and save time in the long run.

Who's Got Your Back?

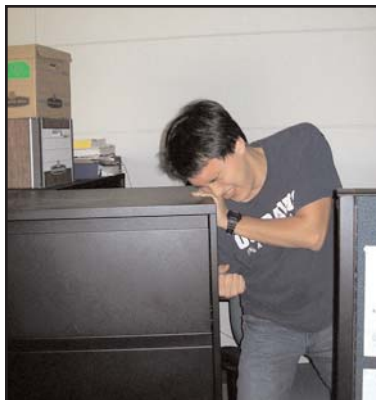
The simple answer is – You! Each one of us has the most control over the health of our backs. Preventing strains, sprains and other back injuries is important in all work environments as well as at home. Your back's health is more important than gaining a few minutes by cutting corners on safety. Reduce the chances of back injury by staying fit, maintaining proper ergonomics, following safe work processes and practicing good Personal Risk Management.

Your Department Safety Coordinator (DSC) has resources if you would like to learn more about back safety. You're also encouraged to visit the Safety Services website at <http://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu> for links to education and training, forms and information about workplace safety. The Safety Services staff is available to help you with safety strategies and implementation of plans and programs. Work closely with your DSC and contact the staff in UC Davis Environmental Health and Safety and Occupational Health for tools and advice on staying safe and healthy. You can also contact Bob Wachter, Injury Prevention Specialist, 530-297-4605 rawachter@ucdavis.edu for a brief 10-15 minute safety session with your staff on back safety, prevention of strains and sprains, or any other safety topic that is important to your department's injury prevention program.

Special Message for DEPARTMENT SAFETY COORDINATORS

Use this checklist to be sure you're getting the maximum value from Safety Spotlight resources.

- Print and post the Monthly Safety Spotlight poster in well-traveled areas such as break rooms, restrooms and entranceways.
- Ask your supervisor for five to ten minutes of the next staff meeting to discuss one or two of the Safety Discussion Topics provided below. If you do not have any upcoming meetings, you can distribute the Safety Discussion sheets to your colleagues by email or hard copy.
- Encourage everyone to complete the "body mechanics" Safety Quiz (online or print out copies). You might consider a special recognition for those in your department who complete the quiz.
- Using the "Ergonomic Approach Worksheet" provided in the Safety Discussion Topics below, work with your team to identify possible injury factors and solutions to address those factors.
- This month's Safety Discussion Topics also provide simple, relaxing stretch exercises. Encourage your co-workers to take frequent mini-breaks and give the exercises a try.
- View the online training videos and encourage your staff to view them also. Use some of the video content as discussion points for your next safety-related meeting.
- Contact your Department Safety Advisor if you need assistance in understanding or using any of the materials provided in this month's Safety Spotlight.
- You're also invited to contact Bob Wachter at 530-297-4605 or rawachter@ucdavis.edu for questions or to schedule a 10 - 15 minute safety session with your staff.



It Happened One Night... ...An Imaginary Scenario

The date: An evening in early November 2009.

The scene: An office on the UC Davis Campus.

The player: Careless Chris, a fictitious campus employee prone to making bad decisions about workplace safety.

The hour is 6:30 PM and we find Chris hard at work in his cubicle, packing. His office is being moved to different building, and a crew is expected in the morning to move all the furnishings, electronics and other materials to the new location. It's late, but Chris is intent on putting the finishing touches

on his packing job. One side of the room is stacked with neatly labeled boxes ready to be moved. On the other side of the room are stacks of papers and other materials yet to be packed. Unfortunately for Chris, these items are behind a large file cabinet so he can't reach them.

It's decision time. Will Chris wait until help arrives to move the obstacle, or will he try to shift it by himself?

Chris is impatient and distracted. He's concerned that the proposal he's working on will be delayed if there's any problem with the office move. And, he's determined to finish packing before heading home. He makes a quick decision to move the file cabinet himself. He braces himself and starts pushing it with all his strength.

Deep in the lumbar area of Chris's back, his muscles and tendons are pulled and twisted beyond their limits, resulting in sudden and extreme pain. Chris spends the next day in bed. A trip to the clinic confirms that his quick decision caused a severe back strain that will take weeks to heal. His doctor recommends a course of recovery including physical therapy and prescription medication. She tells Chris that he will probably be prone to similar injury in the future because of the damage to his back.

Chris is feeling the indirect effects too. His 5th wedding anniversary celebration is on indefinite hold and so is the ski trip his family planned to take. His co-workers are trying to pick up the slack since he can't go to the office, and the important proposal he was so concerned about is irretrievably delayed.

Too bad Careless Chris didn't evaluate the risk factors before trying to push the cabinet out of the way. He was tired, impatient and in a mindset of denial about the possibility of injury. Once again, a moment's lapse in judgment results in long-term consequences for the injured person as well as his family and co-workers.

In this imaginary scenario, Chris got a memorable wake-up call on back safety. Let's hope this experience teaches him to make the right decisions and avoid strains, sprains and back injury in the future! To learn what he did wrong and what he should have done right, review the Safety Discussion Topics below.



Safety Discussion Topics

Discussion points designed to make your department safety meetings more interesting and productive. Download in horizontal format to include in your PowerPoint presentation, or download in vertical format to print out as handouts or bulletin board reminders.

Get to Know Your Back

A quick reference illustrating the structures and mechanics that keep us moving and functioning.

Lifting Safety Checklist

Make it a habit to check these items before lifting to protect your muscles, tendons and nerves from damage.

Back Safety - Easy as 1-2-3

Good posture, exercise and healthy eating: the foundations of back safety. Good advice for long-term health.

Simple Stretches for a Healthy Back

Three pages of easy, relaxing stretches that are appropriate for any workplace.

The Ergonomic Approach to Back Safety

An easy worksheet to help you identify and address risk factors in your workplace that can lead to back injury.

[November 2009 Safety Discussion Topics in PowerPoint - for presentation](#)

[November 2009 Safety Discussion Topics in PDF format - for handouts](#)