

Back Care for Life



This information will help you take care of your back. These tips can be applied to your work, home and leisure activities.

Correct Posture

- Maintain correct posture for standing, sitting and lifting at all times.
- Work directly in front of you (example: at the sink, desk, bed or table). Avoid twisting or reaching for objects, regardless of their size.



Organize Work Areas

- Gather equipment for specific activities (example: baking, woodworking, sewing).
- Rearrange cupboards/closets so items you use often are within easy reach.
- Use a Lazy-Susan® or pegboards to help organize your work area.

Plan Ahead

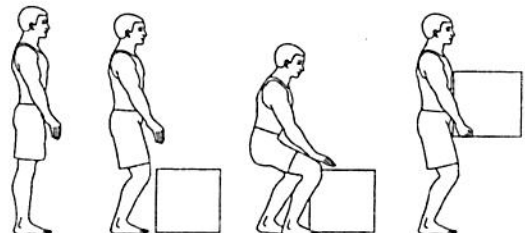
- Organize your day or week. Alternate light and heavy jobs.
- Assess the job. Can you eliminate or ask someone else to do part of the job?
- Gather and prepare all equipment and the work area before starting.
- Do not rush the activity, as this often leads to early fatigue.
- Plan rest periods to avoid getting tired.

Minimize Carrying and Lifting

- Always use proper lifting techniques, regardless of what you are lifting.
- Stay within your work space.
- Use a cart.
- Slide the object instead of lifting it.
- If you have had surgery, do not lift more than 5 pounds (2½ kg) until your surgeon says you may.

How to lift properly:

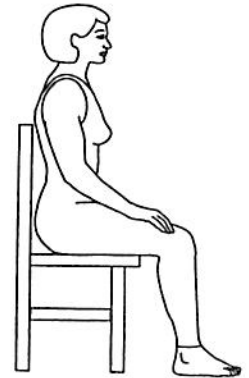
1. Stand with your feet apart to create a wide base of support.
2. Get close to the object.
3. Bend at your hips and knees
4. Keep your back straight.
5. Place your feet in the direction you are going to move. Move your feet to turn. Do not twist your back.



Correct Working Heights

Sitting

- Choose a chair with arm rests and a firm back support.
- Chair height should allow your feet to rest flat on the floor. Your knees should be at the same level as your hips, with your thighs comfortably supported.
- Desk/table height should support your forearms comfortably.
- Raise the height of your work surface by putting 2 or 3 books underneath.
- Use an angled board or book stand to avoid bending your head forward for a long period of time.



Standing

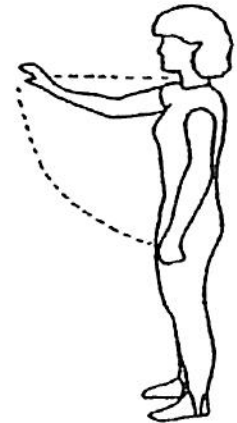
- The ideal work height for sinks, workbenches and counters is about 2 inches (5 cm) below your elbow.
- Back strain can be reduced by placing one foot on a footstool. Switch feet once in a while.

Working within you reach

Whether sitting or standing, do not reach:

- higher than shoulder height
- lower than hips
- further than arm's length

To keep work within your reach use stools, ladders or long-handled equipment. You can also squat, kneel or move closer to the object.



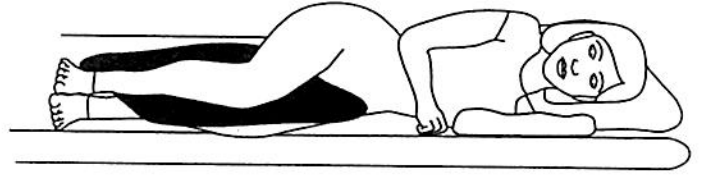
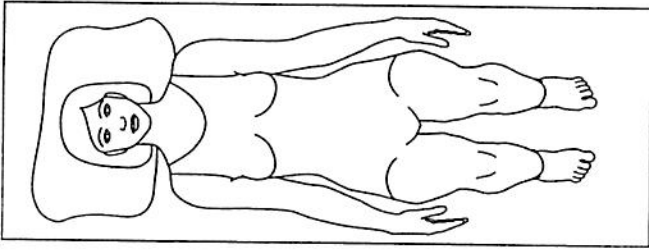
Personal-Care

- When sitting to put on pants, shoes, and socks bring your ankle toward you or support your foot on a bed or stool. When standing, put your foot on a chair or get down on one knee.
- Avoid bending over the sink. Place a washbasin on the bathroom counter, or open the cupboard doors below the sink to allow bending at the knees.
- A walk in shower is preferable to a tub. Use rubber mat or non-skid decals.
- If you use a tub, get down on one knee to turn on the taps. Once inside the tub, kneel to get to the sitting position.
- Avoid over-reaching by using a long-handled brush, soap-on-a-rope or a shower caddy.



Sleeping

- Sleep in a well supported position on a supportive mattress



Sexual Activity

- A comfortable mattress in good condition is important to support your back.
- Get into a comfortable and supported position, maintaining correct spinal curves (for example: lying on your back or side). Work with your partner to adapt positions for your comfort.
- Tell your partner right away if back discomfort occurs. Try another position or stop the activity.

House Work

General Tips

- Use long-handled tools or cleaning devices.
- Use castors on furniture and cleaning equipment (example: wash bucket, vacuum).
- Know your lifting and carrying limits. Divide the load, fill bags or containers half full or make more trips.
- If a task is troublesome, you may need to ask for help.

Cleaning

Mopping, Vacuuming, or Sweeping

- Face the area to be cleaned.
- Place your feet shoulder width apart with one foot forward and the other foot back. Shift your weight from one leg to the other in a rocking motion.
- When working in a large area, clean a small area within your reach before moving to the next area.

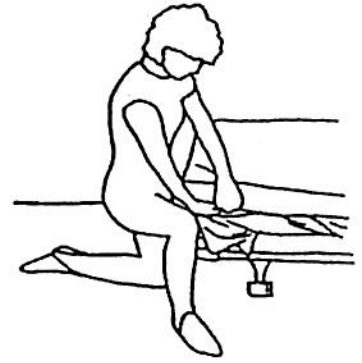


Low Levels

- Use long-handled brushes.
- Squat or get down on one knee to clean a bathtub, wipe up a spill or plug in an appliance.
- If these tasks are troublesome, you may need to ask for help.

Making a Bed

- Straighten the covers before getting out of bed.
- Position the bed away from the wall so you can walk around it rather than reaching across.
- If the bed is low, kneel down to make it or raise the height of the bed by:
 - adding a second mattress
 - buying longer legs
 - placing the bed on blocks



Laundry

- Face the machine directly when taking clothes out of top-loading machines.
- To reach into the machine, bend forward at the hips allowing one foot to come off the floor. Use long-handled tongs to extend your reach. Support some of your weight by placing a hand on the washer.
- Squat or get down on one knee to load/unload front loading machines.
- Remove small amounts of clothing at a time.



Shopping

- Use the services many stores provide, such as home delivery, carry-out service or parcel pick up.
- Use shopping carts instead of carrying parcels.
- Put parcels in your car where they are easy to reach.

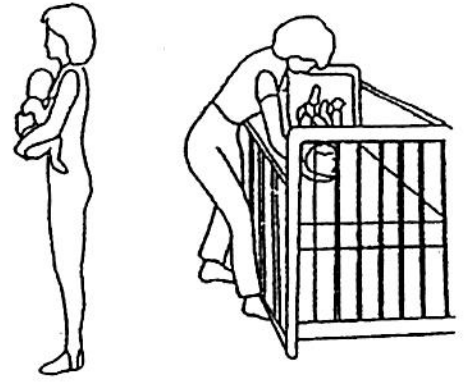
Yard Work

- Take breaks often.
- Kneel or get down on all fours when gardening.
- Use long-handled equipment.
- Use raised flowerbeds and window boxes.
- Transplant seedlings at table height.
- Use a self-propelled lawn mower if possible. Mow across long, gentle slopes rather than going up and down them.
- If shoveling snow, use a small shovel with a long handle. Push the snow rather than lift it. Move small amounts at one time.



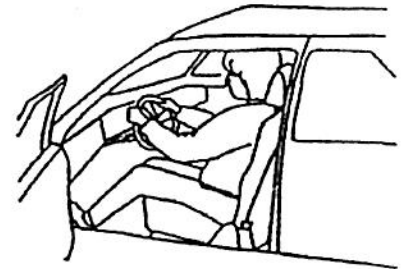
Infant and Child Care

- Extra care when lifting and carrying must be taken, because a child wiggles and moves. Hold your child close to you.
- Put the crib side down instead of reaching over the edge, when lifting your child out of a crib.
- Work at counter level or at a height which allows you to kneel on the floor to wash and change your child.
- Use a stroller/shopping cart to carry your child long distances.
- When possible, have the child climb to a better working height for you (example: onto a chair).



Travelling

- Take breaks often, change positions often, or get out of the car to take a short walk if you must travel longer distances.
- If driving, adjust the seat close to the wheel and pedals so your legs and arms are in a comfortable position and your thighs and back are supported.
- Get into a car from street level or into a van or truck from curb level. Sit first, then lift your legs in one at a time. Reverse the procedure to get out.
- If you have had surgery, ask your doctor when you can drive.



Car Care

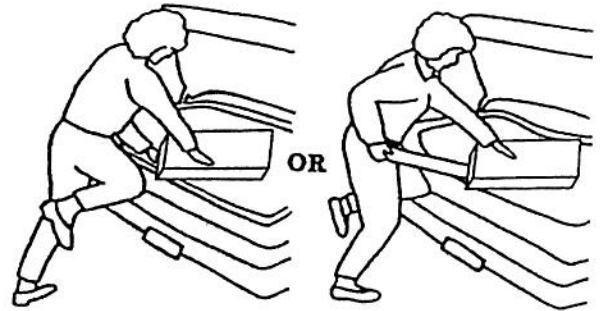
- Use an automatic car wash, ask someone else to wash your car, or use a long-handled brush with a sprayer.
- To clean inside the car, do one half at a time. For low levels, kneel or squat, and for high levels, sit on the seats or stand. Use a stool to clean the roof.
- To do general maintenance (example: checking oil or windshield washer fluid), bend forward at the hips, allowing one foot to lift off the ground. Use your hands to support as needed.

Getting Things Out of the Trunk

- Place one knee or foot up on the bumper. Slide the object close to the edge of the trunk. Pick it up, holding it close to your body and lift it out of the trunk, removing your knee or foot from the bumper.

OR

- Brace your knees against the trunk, keeping knees slightly bent and stabilize your back.
- Use proper lifting technique and follow weight restrictions for lifting after surgery.



Returning to Work

Ask your doctor when you can return to work. This may depend on the rate and degree of recovery after surgery and the type of work you do.

Prolonged Sitting

- Choose a chair with a firm seat. The seat height should be adjustable. A seat with adjustable tilt is also advised.
- The back rest should be firm and adjustable. Sit completely back in the chair so that the back rest is supporting your low back.
- Use a footstool if your feet do not reach the floor.
- Change your sitting position often. Take a break from sitting at least every 20 to 30 minutes.

Using a Computer

- The keyboard should be level with your forearm, when your shoulders are relaxed and your elbows are bent at 90 degrees.
- The middle of the screen should be at eye level.
- Have lighting directly over your work.
- Position your work or desk to decrease glare from screens, keyboards, and windows.

Prolonged Standing

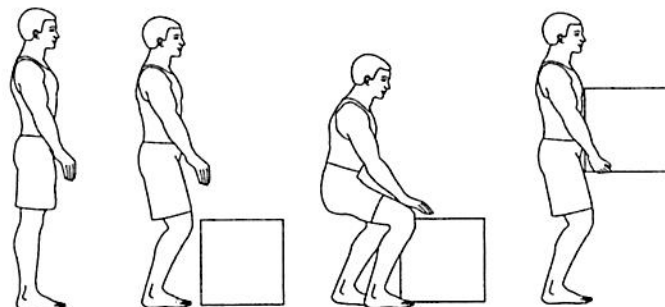
- Put one foot on a footstool and change feet occasionally.
- Wear shoes with thick, absorbent soles (like work boots or runners), or add high-density, cushioned insoles.
- Wear shoes that are supportive and fit properly, with heels no higher than 1½ inches (3.75 cm).
- Change your standing position often. Take a break from standing every 20 to 30 minutes.

Vibrating Machinery

- Take short breaks every 20 to 30 minutes.
- Sit on cushions or seats that are designed to absorb shock (example: air seat).
- When standing, wear work boots with thick absorbent soles.

Repetitive Lifting and Moving

- Slide the object close to you to avoid reaching.
- Bend at your hips and knees to reach low objects such as files, cupboards, drawers.
- Assess the object for weight and size, before you lift.
- Know the lifting limit you can manage safely. When the object is heavier than you can manage, ask for help or use a mechanical lifting device.
- Take a short break every hour and alternate light and heavy tasks.
- Do not hurry. Control your movements.



Awkward Positions

- Keep your weight evenly distributed between both feet, when working on a ladder or step stool. Move the ladder to avoid reaching too far.
- Use scaffolding for large areas.
- Put one knee up on the platform, or climb onto the platform if you need to reach across a wide platform.
- Move objects from heights, across wide areas or from the floor, in several steps (i.e. put objects that you use often at waist height, to avoid reaching).
- Sit, kneel or lie down on a mechanic's dolly when working in a cramped space (such as under a cupboard or car).
- Alternate tasks and stop regularly for quick "stretch breaks" if you must work in an awkward position.

Recreation and Sports

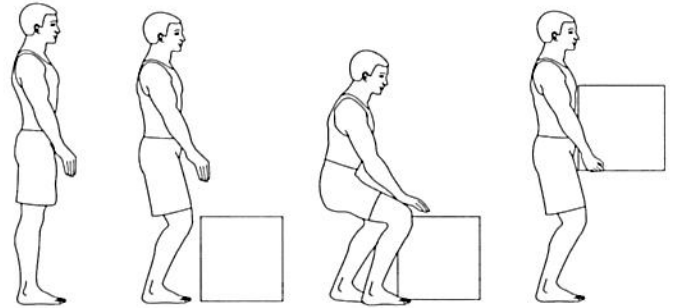
- Take lessons when beginning a new sport in order to learn correct techniques. Some sports put greater stress on your back than others (examples: high impact aerobics, football, racquet sports, weight training, wind surfing, hockey, jogging)
- Take breaks often when doing leisure activities that you would spend long periods sitting or standing (examples: needlework, playing the guitar, watching television, reading, woodworking, painting).
- Low impact activities, such as walking, may be resumed as pain allows, and are encouraged to maintain fitness and aid in recovery.
- If you have had surgery, it is important to discuss the specifics of returning to a sport with your surgeon.

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