

## Strain Prevention: Best Practices for Work or Home

Most people will experience fatigue or a strain injury at some time in their lives. Strain injuries are not often caused by a single lift or one reach, but more commonly result from doing something repeatedly that involves awkward postures, heavy weights, or excessive force. We can avoid fatigue or recover quickly by following some basic best practices at work and at home.

- It's important to warm up and stretch before lifting or if starting work after periods of inaction.
- Start with lighter work before strenuous lifts or work.
- Reduce fatigue and avoid strains by using good postures and good techniques while lifting, handling material, or using tools in work situations. Good postures include standing upright and not holding bent-over positions, keeping hands close to the body, keeping wrists straight, and avoiding extended reaches.
- Don't force objects that don't move easily. If the object that is being moved seems to be stuck or can't be shifted, find out why and address that problem first rather than trying to jerk the object free.
- Take a few seconds to plan before lifting:
  - Lifting at waist level with hands close to the torso is the best position to put power behind your movement. Try to avoid over-the-shoulder and below-the-knee lifts or lifting with hands extended in front of the body.
  - Ask yourself: How much does the object weigh? Can you lift it safely alone or do you need help? Do you have room to move and sit the load down without reaching or twisting?
  - Bend your knees to pick up and set loads down. Leg muscles are stronger. This also helps keep the spine in a more natural alignment.
  - Get a secure grip before lifting and don't try to catch falling objects.
  - Keep the load close to your body during the entire lift. It means less pressure on the lower back.
  - Never twist! Step in the direction that you want to move and always try to avoid twisting your lower back, even for light loads or a single lift.
  - Move smoothly and avoid jerking motions.
- To avoid shoulder strain, avoid overhead reaching when possible, especially when holding a static position. Use a proper step stool or ladder to get closer to the work and reduce the reach distance.
- Keep your wrists straight when using tools or pushing and pulling. Pull or push straight ahead and move to avoid pulling to the side with elbows away from the body or with bent wrists.
- When possible, alternate tasks to use different muscle groups and let other areas of the body rest and recover.