

There's Only One Right Way to Lift, Right?

OHS information for workers and employers

What's Right?

There is no single “correct” technique for lifting objects that reduces the possibility of injury. Despite their popularity, “how to lift safely” training programs have not been found to be an effective method of preventing back pain or injury.

The standard advice has always been to place the load between your knees, and then lift with your legs, not your back, otherwise known as the “squat lift”. Doing so means that objects are lifted between knee and shoulder height – the most efficient lifting and lowering happens within this height range.

Alternatives to the squat technique are required when loads are too big or awkward to place between the knees. Examples include:

- appliances;
- elongated piping;
- pets or large animals.

The **kinetic technique** involves getting the object moving smoothly. Its momentum reduces the amount of effort the worker uses to lift the object. Swinging bags of rice and “tossing” boxes of photocopying paper onto pallets are examples of the kinetic technique in use.

The **freestyle technique** demonstrates worker creativity in devising a safe and effective way of lifting that borrows elements of several different techniques. How the worker actually performs the lift is often influenced by his or her work experience, body size and fitness.

What are Some Characteristics of Proper Lifting?

KEEP THE NATURAL CURVE IN YOUR LOWER BACK

When standing straight, the lower back naturally curves to create a slight hollow. Always try to maintain this curve when lifting, lowering or moving objects. The spine and back are at their most stable in this position.

CONTRACT YOUR ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

Contract the abdominal muscles during lifting, lowering and moving activities. Contracting those muscles even a small amount improves spine stability and reduces the likelihood of injury.

AVOID TWISTING

Twisting the back can make it less stable, increasing the likelihood of injury. Contracting the abdominal muscles helps reduce any tendency to twist.

HOLD IT CLOSE

Keep the load as close to the belly button and body as possible. Doing so reduces the strain on the muscles of the back and trunk. If necessary, use protective clothing such as leather aprons so that sharp, dirty, hot or cold objects can be held as close to the body as possible.

Key Point

The best approach is still to design work areas, work methods and equipment to minimize the amount of manual lifting of low-lying objects.

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Contact Us

OHS Contact Centre

Edmonton & Surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Throughout Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)
- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)

Website

work.alberta.ca/ohs-contact-us

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Occupational Health and Safety
work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Martimo K.P., J.Verbeek, et al. *Effect of training and lifting equipment for preventing back pain in lifting and handling: systematic review*. BMJ (British Medical Journal), Jan 31, 2008

Straker, L.M. *A review of research on techniques for lifting low-lying object: 1. Criteria for evaluation*. Work 19 (2002): 9-18.

Straker, L.M. *A review of research on techniques for lifting low-lying object: 2. Evidence for a correct technique*. Work 20 (2003): 83-96.

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