

## Back Care Tips

### Physical activity is good for your back because it:

- Develops, stretches & strengthens muscles and joints
- Maintains & increases your flexibility
- Prevents your joints from seizing up
- Assists in developing stronger bones
- Keeps your heart and lungs healthy
- Reduces pain by releasing natural chemicals such as endorphins

### Lifting Tips

- **Maintain a Natural Position** - You'll notice your lower back curves naturally when standing straight. Do your best to maintain this posture while lifting, lowering or moving. This position assures the greatest spinal and back stability.
- **Hug That Load** - Holding a load close to your belly and body reduces the strain on the muscles of your back and trunk. If required, wear protective clothing to prevent sharp objects from causing injury.
- **Flex Your Abdominal Muscles** - Contracting your abdominal muscles – or bracing – when lifting, lowering or moving improves your spinal stability. Even slight abdominal contractions can largely reduce your likelihood of getting injured.
- **Don't Twist** - Twisting decreases the stability of your back and increases your likelihood of injury. Pivot with your feet to turn, rather than twisting your body.

### Posture and Sitting Tips

Do not:

- slump-sit (Your low back should be supported)
- Lean forward and downward to reach for your work
- Sit for long periods of time without getting up
- Sit on the floor

Do:

- Sit close to your work. Sit in a chair that is low enough to place both feet on the floor and no lower
- Have a chair that supports your lower back in a slightly arched position
- Use an arm rest whenever possible to reduce stress to the upper body and neck
- Remove your wallet or other bulky material from your back pockets
- Organize your workstation to avoid repetitive bending, twisting or reaching while seated. Remember proper posture when talking on the phone. Do not cradle the phone in the crook of your neck

### Bending and Crouching Tips

- Whether you bend from a seated position, bend from the standing position, crouch on one knee or both knees, or crouch with both feet flat on the floor, keep your back straight, maintain your normal curve, support your weight and bend at the hips and knees!!!

- When bending or crouching, support your weight with the free hand by leaning on a desk, your thigh or whatever is available. Keeping your feet apart allows for greater stability and balance.
- When combining crouching or bending with reaching, stabilize yourself and maintain your lumbar curve.

### **Stretching Tips**

Taking time out to stretch can reduce accumulated tension and allow our bodies to move with greater ease and comfort. Regular Stretching will:

- Reduce muscle tension and allow you to feel more relaxed
- Permit easier movement
- Increase range of motion in all joints
- Prevent injuries
- Make activities easier because it prepares the muscles for movement
- Develop body awareness
- Help reduce stress and its effects
- Feel good!

It is important to stretch in a relaxed manner with sustained movements that focus your attention on the muscles being stretched. Do not bounce, bob, jerk or stretch to the point of pain.

### **Strengthening Tips**

Muscle maintenance is life skill. Incorporate simple core strengthening exercises such as crunches or abdominal contractions into daily activities to ensure you work at building muscle strength on a consistent basis.

- Remember to push yourself gradually to make progress. Start slowly, but be prepared to add to the difficulty or repetition of your exercises on a weekly basis. Form should never be sacrificed.
- Pace yourself and stay within your personal limits.
- Be comfortable and have fun. Don't strain yourself. You may experience slight discomfort initially however there should never be prolonged or moderate pain.
- Gentle, relaxed breathing is key for stretch-relaxation exercise.
- Whenever possible avoid arching your back while exercising.
- Consult with your physician before starting an exercise program.