**Transferring Safety: Prevent Back Injuries**

**OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this class you will be able to:

1. Describe the back and what it does.
2. List things that you can do everyday in your home and at work to prevent back injuries.
3. Describe proper transfer techniques.
4. Discuss back belts and their use in hospitals, nursing homes and other places of work.

**INTRODUCTION**

Almost 20% of all injuries and illnesses on the job are back injuries. One out of every 5 work related injuries and illnesses is a back injury.

Back injuries are a very serious problem. They cost our country 20 to 50 billion dollars every year. These injuries can happen in a factory where workers stack and lift heavy boxes. They can happen in a hotel where people have to push heavy carts with cleaning supplies. They can also happen in a hospital and in a nursing home.

It is far easier to prevent a back injury than living with a bad back. Many people are even forced to leave their job in healthcare because they have injured their back. Fortunately, there are many things that can be done to prevent back injuries. Some of these things are done by the person off the job, some are done by the healthcare worker on the job and other things are done by the hospital or nursing home.

Some of the healthcare workers that can hurt their back include:

- Housekeeping staff who push heavy cleaning carts and/or beds and lift heavy things, like a heavy bucket of water
- Mailroom staff who lift heavy pieces of mail
- Delivery staff who very often get heavy items sent to the hospital or nursing home, such as furniture, medical supplies and equipment
- Physical therapists who transfer and assist with moving of patients and residents from the bed to the chair and from the chair to the bed
- Nursing assistants and others who transport patients or residents from one area of the hospital or nursing home to another area. For example, operating room techs push patients on a stretcher from their room to the operating room. People who work in the emergency room often push their patients to their room when they are admitted into the hospital.
- X Ray techs who often must push a heavy portable X ray machine to the emergency room and the ICU areas and lastly,
- Nursing assistants, nurses, patient care technicians and others. Nursing staff lift and turn patients on a regular basis. They also may move a patients in their beds from one room to another one.

**TELL ME ABOUT THE BACK AND WHAT IT DOES**
Your back is made up of bones, muscles, ligaments and other things. The spine is the part of your back that is made of bones. Your spine is made up of 24 bones, called vertebrae. These bones are placed one on top of another. Each one of these bones is separated from the next one with a soft cushion called a disc. Discs are made up of cartilage. These discs help your back twist, bend and move around. Your back is supported mostly by your stomach muscles. It is also supported by the muscles and ligaments of the back.

**PREVENT BACK INJURIES OFF THE JOB**

There are several things that you must do in your daily life to prevent hurting your back. Here are some of the things that you can do at home to prevent back injuries.

- **Exercise.** Do regular exercise after you have checked with your doctor to make sure that your chosen form of exercise is safe for you. Some of the exercise that you can do to prevent back injuries are swimming, running, jogging, walking, rowing, muscle strengthening and stretching exercises. These sports and exercises are good for the back. Sports and exercises like golf, bowling, racquet ball, football, baseball and weight lifting are not good ones to prevent back injuries. These sports involve rapid and unplanned for twists, turns, starts and stops.
• Rest. Get enough sleep and rest. You may hurt your back when your body is weak, tired and not rested. You can also hurt your back when your mind is tired and not rested.

• A Good Diet. A good diet makes a healthy body, one that is strong and in good shape.

• Healthy Body Weight. Excess body weight puts extra strain on you back and stomach muscles. If you should lose weight, do it now. Talk to your doctor about a healthy weight loss plan that can work for you.

• Use Good Posture. You can prevent back pain and back problems by sitting, standing and lifting while using good posture. Sit straight with your spine upright. Do NOT slouch. Stand tall with your head up and your shoulders back. Do not hunch over.

• Sleep in the Right Way. Use a firm mattress not a soft one. Sleep on your side with your knees bent up toward your chin. If you prefer, sleep on your back with a pillow under your knees. These positions and a firm mattress gives your back needed support and rest.

WAYS TO PREVENT BACK INJURIES AT WORK
One of the most important things that you can do to prevent hurting your back at work is to GET HELP when you need it. Everyone who works in a hospital or nursing home is part of a team. We must work together as a team. When a member of the team needs you help, you must help them. When you need help, ask a team member to help you.

When you are lifting a patient or assisting a patient to stand from a sitting position:

1. Get help if you need it.
2. Use a mechanical lifting device whenever you can. These devices are safe and easy to use, often without the help of another person. If you do not know how to use it, ask the nurse to teach you how to use it and use it safely so the person does not get hurt. Click here to see a lifting device, similar to the one that you probably have at your work place. http://www.susquemicro.com/nav/pages/all/hoyer_lift.html
3. Explain to the person what you are about to do. Even very weak patients can help you with a lift or transfer when they know what you are about to do. You may want to say, “Mrs. Wilson, I am going to put my arms under your arms and when I count to 3 stand up and then sit in the chair” or “Mr. Dock, I am going to move you up in the bed. Please bend your knees and put your heels into the mattress. When I count to 3, push your heels into the mattress and lift up your backside and push your body toward the top of the bed.”
4. Do some stretching and warm up exercise if your body is not warm and loose. Shake your body out. Stretch your arms up toward the ceiling. Jog in place for a couple of seconds.

5. Stay as close as possible to the person or object that you are about to lift.
6. Face the person or object that you are about to lift.
7. Keep your back straight up and down.
8. Tuck your chin in and keep your neck and head straight up and down.
9. Keep your feet wide apart so that you have a wide base of support.
10. Pivot on your feet in the direction of the move. For example, if you are pulling a person up in bed with the help of another person, you should remain facing the person during the lift but you should shift your weight by rocking onto the foot that is closest to the top of the bed. If you are moving a person from the bed to the chair, stand with your feet wide apart and pivot from facing the bed to facing the chair, in the direction of the move. Do NOT twist. Pivot and keep your spine, or back, straight.

11. Make sure that you have a good grip on the object that you are about to lift.

12. Use the long and strong muscles of your legs to lift. Do NOT use the muscles of your back to lift. For example, if you are lifting a scale off the floor, bend at the knees and squat down. Do NOT bend your back. After you grip the scale, raise your body up to a straight position with the scale as close to your body as possible. Reverse these steps to put the scale down on the floor.

13. Use smooth and slow motions. Do NOT hurry. Take your time. Do not use jerky motions. They can hurt your back.

14. Take small breaks between lifts. Take a deep breath and rest for a moment.

Another basic back safety rule is PUSH and do NOT PULL. Pushing is much safer than pulling.

HOW GOOD ARE BACK BELTS AND SUPPORTS?

For the last several years many hospitals and other companies have used back belts and back supports to protect their worker’s backs against injury. These back supports, seen in Home
Depot stores for example, are a matter of choice. Some think that these back belts help prevent back injuries and others do not know if they do help. Nonetheless, if you are given a back belt to use as you work, wear it and wear it properly but also do not think that you do not have to use good body mechanics and lifting skills. These skills must be used with and without a back belt. Do NOT get a false sense of security with a back belt.