Preventing Strains and Sprains



Lifting, pushing, and overreaching are common causes of strains and sprains. Any job that requires you to sit or stand bent in an awkward position for long periods of time can cause excess stress and strain on muscles. Most strains and sprains affect the back, arms, and shoulders. However, there are some very simple things you can do to prevent or minimize body strains and sprains.

Many strains and sprains occur because of poor material handling. Workers lift things that weigh too much or they lift incorrectly. Lift correctly by bending your knees, not your back. Carry loads close to your body. Injuries can occur when workers try to pull or lift a heavy or awkward object without help or lift an object while twisting from the waist. When carrying a load, avoid bending or lifting upward unnecessarily. Keep as much of the load as you can at waist level.

Get help with heavy loads. Don’t try to move or lift an object you can’t handle. Instead of lifting a 75-pound load, break it down into smaller parts. If you can’t break it down, get help from a mechanical device or lift it with another worker. Make sure moving equipment works properly or it will cause you to strain unnecessarily just trying to get it to work. If the wheels on a cart are not aligned, you could strain your arms, shoulders, and back trying to move it.

Change your working positions frequently. Chronic strain due to an unchanging work position can weaken your back, arms, and shoulders. Adjust working heights to prevent slumping or excessive reaching. A vicious cycle develops when chronic strain continues; muscles become less able to withstand strenuous activity and grow more prone to injury of all kinds. Stretch during the day to increase your flexibility. Take body relaxation breaks by letting your shoulders and neck muscles go limp; swivel your head or arms or flex your hands and fingers.

Take care of your whole body with exercise, proper posture, a sensible diet, and adequate rest. If your muscles or ligaments have weakened over time from lack of exercise or age, you are more apt to get a strain or sprain than if you are physically fit.