

TAKING CARE OF YOUR BACK: Physical therapists and APTA offer tips on the prevention of back injury.

AVOIDING BACK INJURY

Everyone is vulnerable to back injury, but certain occupations present added risk. Truck drivers sit for long periods while being jostled by vibration; they lead in back injuries. Nurses are also at high risk; bending over bedsides and lifting and moving patients are hazardous to *their* health.

Everyday activities can be dangerous, as well: even sitting puts an added load on the lumbar spine! Expectant mothers find their backs stressed in new ways. Parents lifting babies and toddlers are also at risk. We can't avoid every stressful activity. The key to avoiding back injury lies in minimizing the risk inherent in any activity by applying these simple procedures.

Work on your posture. Don't slouch. Maintain the natural "arch" in your lower back whether standing or sitting.

Lift with your legs. Bend your knees, not your back, and you greatly reduce stress to your low back. Don't bend over the object, bend your legs and keep your back straight. And most important, don't twist as you lift. Keep the load close to your body, and carry heavy objects waist high.

Sit with care. Prolonged sitting in one position is a back hazard you might not suspect. Lumbar support and periodic breaks to move around are essential. Driving is even dangerous to your back. Select a driving position with your knees slightly bent and your back arched. Stop frequently and get out and walk.

Control your weight. Being overweight, especially if you have a "pot belly" puts added stress on your low back.

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