



# PLAYING IT **SAFE**

## Back Belts and Injury Prevention

*Helpful tips for reducing your risk of injury at work*

A healthy back is a fundamental part of many of the tasks you perform on the job. Heavy lifting, if not performed using safe methods, can result in serious damage, and some experts say that the risk of injury can be further lessened by the use of a back belt.

However, the lack of scientific evidence has raised concerns over the legitimacy of this belief. Despite this, it is still widely accepted that the only way to effectively prevent back injury is to follow the correct lifting procedures, with or without a back belt.

### Important Considerations

Before you begin using a back belt, take into consideration any medical problems you may have that will influence your safety, including high blood pressure, previous back problems and other conditions. Talk to your supervisor about adjusting your work to accommodate for your condition.

### Proper Lifting Techniques

If you wear a back belt for support, the following lifting techniques will help you to ensure its optimal use:

- Know your limit. Understand how much you can lift safely, regardless of whether or not you are wearing a back belt.
- Choose a belt wisely. There are over 70 different types of belts; make sure that the one you use is appropriate for the job at hand.
- Maintain proper body position and lifting mechanics.

- In order to maintain your muscle strength, remember to loosen the back belt when you're not lifting. If you don't, the back belt may actually cause your muscles to weaken.
- When lifting, bend at your knees, not at your waist.
- Lift with your legs; squat to pick up items off the floor.
- Keep objects close to your body. Reaching outward puts stress on your lower back.
- Don't turn at the waist. To turn, pivot your entire body.
- Use co-workers for assistance with oversized or bulky objects.

### Use Common Sense

Remember, good body mechanics are not replaced simply by wearing a back belt; you need to be aware of your body position and use proper lifting techniques.

Also, keep in mind that a back belt will not make you stronger; you'll need to take all of the same safety precautions you use as when lifting heavy objects without a back belt.



### General Lifting Method

Follow these tips when lifting with or without a back belt:

1. Lift with your legs and carry loads close to you between shoulder and knuckle height.
2. Make sure your footing is firm and your path is clear.
3. When setting the load down, use your leg muscles and keep your back as straight as possible.