



## Back and Lifting Safety

Nearly everyone's job requires them to lift loads of varied weights, from time to time. A good understanding of safe lifting practices can help you prevent back injuries.

Our backs are ideally designed to support our own weight. When we carry additional weight, such as boxes and equipment, we need to consider how best to do it. The following is a brief guide to proper lifting:

1. Get close to the load with a stable stance. Bend at the knees, not at the waist.
2. Get a firm grip with your palms, not your fingers, before you lift.
3. Begin the lift slowly, keeping the weight as close to you as possible. Keep your back straight, and use large muscle groups, like legs, abs, and buttocks, to do the work.
4. Once upright, change directions by pointing your feet in the direction you want to go, and turn your whole body.
5. Reverse the process to lower a load.

What you can do:

**Stretch** - If you know you are going to be doing work that may be hard on your back, take some time to warm up and gently stretch out your back muscles.

**Slow Down** - If you are doing a lot of lifting, pace yourself. If you get tired early on, you are more prone to injury.

**Rest** - Take frequent, short rest breaks, even if you feel like you could continue. This helps muscles recharge between lifts.

**Get in and stay in shape** - Fine tune your body! Strengthen your stomach muscles, lose a little weight, and increase your flexibility.

Work smarter, not harder!

**Consider if you really need to lift the item.** Can you unload the contents of a box, piece by piece? Can you move it with a cart or dolly?

**Consider your ability.** Should you ask for a quick assist? Can someone help you with what you need to do? Can you move the load in pieces? Asking for help is smart!

**Consider the work surface.** Does the item need to be set on the floor? Can you use a table or bench to get the work closer to you?

Training in back safety and lifting is required for some jobs at OHSU. Live and online training is offered by Environmental Health and Radiation Safety (503 494-7795), and they can answer questions about proper lifting, materials handling, and back care.

