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Lifting

Introduction

Back injuries can be painful, costly, and often cause workers disabilities and lifelong problems. In many industries and in many pork operations, back injuries account for the largest amount of lost-time and economic losses from injury. Ultimately, producers pay for these costs in the form of lost work time by productive employees or through worker's compensation insurance costs. Back and other lifting-related injuries can result from lifting heavy bags of feed, carrying dead animals, moving feeders and gates for cleaning, or moving power washers from building to building.

Here are some of the important risk factors that can contribute to back injuries. Even relatively small weights lifted can contribute to a back injury:

- Lifting a load beyond your capability
- High frequency lifts (many lifts per minute)
- Lifting and twisting at the same time
- Lifting an object directly off of the ground (as compared to lifting from a raised surface)
- Lifting to an extended height
- Reaching/extending your body horizontally to perform a lift
- Lifting for many hours over the course of a workday
- Lifting/manipulating awkward objects that are difficult to handle or control

Prevention

The best way to prevent back injuries is to use a mechanical device or other means to minimize the forces of lifting. A good example is a dolly, hand truck, hog cart, or other device that can help you lift and carry heavy objects. You can also lift with a helper or find other smart ways to lift less weight. For example, producers can purchase heavy products (like feed or additives) in slightly smaller packaging to minimize the back injury risk.

For those tasks where lifting cannot be avoided, following safe lifting procedures will reduce your risk of back, shoulder, knee, and other lifting-related injuries.

Here are some points to remember:

- Don't begin any lifting task first thing in the morning when you are still "cold" and your body is stiff. Allow for 20 minutes or more of movement and moderate activity before you begin lifting.
- Bend your knees – not your waist – when picking up a heavy object.
- Lift with the large muscles in your legs – not your back. Keep your back as straight as possible.
- Avoid twisting your body.
- Avoid lifting objects higher than chest high.

Lifting pigs can be a very difficult task as they can sometimes weigh just as much, if not more, than you. When lifting pigs there are specific guidelines you should follow. For pigs weighing less than 40 pounds do the following:

- Position yourself alongside and to the rear of the pig to be lifted;
- Secure your grip on the hind leg furthest from you with your lifting hand and use your other hand to hold the other hind leg;
- As you lift, use the front legs of the pig to help support some of the weight until the pig is in a vertical position; and
- Lift the pig straight up to clear any gates. Lift with your legs and arms and not with your back

Here are other general points to remember that are known to reduce the overall risk of a back injury from a specific work task. The more of these measures you can take, the less the risk to workers:

- Minimize the amount of weight to be lifted
- Structure the job so that the worker does not need to lift very often (reduce the frequency)
- Never lift and twist at the same time
- When possible, place objects to be lifted onto a table or platform so that the worker is not lifting all the way from the ground
- Limit the height to which objects need to be lifted – the risk climbs dramatically when a lift needs to go above chest level
- Move the item to be lifted AND its "destination" closer to the person doing the lift
- Limit the number of hours in a day during which lifting will occur
- When possible, provide "handles" or other ways to get a better grip on items to be lifted

Summary

When lifting keep your back straight by tucking in your chin and lift with the strong leg muscles not the weaker back muscles. Always ask for help lifting heavy, awkward items and when possible, use mechanical assistance to move heavy items.

DO:

- Tuck in your chin to keep the back as straight as possible while lifting.
- Lift with the strong leg muscles.
- Ask for help with heavy, awkward items.
- When possible, use mechanical assistance to move heavy items.

DON'T:

- Use your back muscles to do the lifting.
- Try to lift an item that is too heavy or awkward.
- Twist your body while carrying an object.
- Attempt team lifting without proper coordination. One individual should be responsible for the control of the action. If one worker lifts too soon, shifts the load, or lowers it improperly, either worker may be injured.

Additional Resources

BACK INJURIES - NATION'S NUMBER ONE WORKPLACE SAFETY PROBLEM (OSHA) (http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=FACT_SHEETS&p_id=146)

Safe Lifting and Material Handling (NASD) (<http://wwwtest.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001501-d001600/d001509/13.html>)

Preventing Low Back Pain in Agriculture (<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000901-d001000/d000956/d000956.html>)

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