

# Spare Your Spine

Back problems account for a large part of reported injuries here at MSU. In three months time 10 were reported, and most happened when lifting an object.

## Contributors to back problems:

- Reaching while lifting.
- Poor posture--how one sits or stands.
- Stressful living and working activities--staying in one position for too long.
- Bad body mechanics--how one lifts, pushes, pulls, or carries objects.
- Poor physical condition-losing the strength and endurance to perform physical tasks without strain.
- Poor design of job or work station.
- Repetitive lifting of awkward items or equipment
- Twisting while lifting.
- Bending while lifting.
- Heavy lifting.
- Fatigue.
- Poor footing such as slippery floors, or constrained posture.
- Lifting with forceful movement.
- Vibration, such as with lift truck drivers, delivery drivers, etc.



## Rules for safe lifting:

- Make use of lifting aids, such as dollies or hand trucks, forklifts and overhead cranes if available.
- Ask for help. If you suspect a load is over 50 lbs, do NOT lift it by yourself. You may also need help with lighter loads if they are bulky or an unusual shape.
- Know where you will put the load and make sure the spot is cleared for it.
- Have a clear path of travel, or at least be aware of any stumbling blocks.
- Wear gloves when handling objects with rough or sharp edges.
- Be sure of a good grip & good footing.
- Keep the load close to your body.
- Lift in a smooth, controlled manner. Don't jerk the load or twist your body.

## Proper Lifting Techniques:

You have heard it dozens of times, “bend at the knees, not your waist.”

This is necessary, because if you bend at the waist & lean over with your back horizontal, the load is too far from the center of balance. All the strain is on the lower back muscles, which aren't built to take it. The result can be a sprained back or worse.

“Bend at the knees” does not mean to squat until you sit on your heels. You won't have any leg power to raise a load from that position. Your position at the start of the lift should be more of a crouch, so the power of your leg muscles can be exerted.

Also, when you hear to “keep your back straight”, it does not mean straight like a flagpole, that in itself would make you off balance. It means be reasonably straight, so the back muscles won't be doing all the work.

## Beware When You've Been Away

Remember that muscles quickly get out of shape during vacation, or a spell of illness. Be doubly careful those first few days back on the job; ease into it gradually.