

Healthy Back Habits: Lifting for Less Stress

You have probably heard the phrase, “Lift with your legs, not your back.” This is important to prevent strain on your back muscles, which could result in pain. Back muscles are small muscles in the body. Although you can work to strengthen them, their size prevents them from holding up against the stress of lifting something heavy. The muscles of the lower body are some of the largest and can be some of the strongest. By lifting with your legs, you put the stress on larger muscles that are more capable of handling a heavier load.

Lifting correctly is a habit that should be practiced no matter what the weight of the object. Sometimes when we think of lifting, only things like boxes or furniture come to mind. However, lifting a child or pet can also put strain on the back. Practicing proper lifting technique is just as important when lifting small children as it is when lifting a heavy box or piece of furniture.

Here are a few tips for proper lifting:

- **Position yourself** close to the object you plan to lift.
- **Bend at the hips and knees**, not at the waist with your knees straight.
- **Practice good posture.** Your upper body should be upright and aligned as you squat down to lift the object.
- **Use your legs.** Push through your legs, using the leg muscles to stand as you lift the object.
- **Support your spine;** tighten your stomach muscles as you lift.
- **Keep breathing** normally as you lift the object.
- **Ask for help;** if an object is too heavy, get a partner to help you lift it.
- **Move your feet.** When turning while carrying a heavy object, position yourself by moving your feet; avoid twisting at the back to move an object.
- **Set it down slowly.** Bend at the knees and hips, tighten your abdominals and squat to lower the object.



Sources:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, Office of Research Services, Division of Safety, **Ergonomics Maintain Your Curves**, available online at <http://www.nih.gov/od/ors/ds/ergonomics/index.html>.
- The Cleveland Clinic Health Information Center, **Posture for a Healthy Back**, available online at <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/0300/0359.asp?index=4485>
- Heyward, Vivian H., **Advanced Fitness Assessment & Exercise Prescription**, 3rd ed., Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1998.

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