

# Protecting your back



Do you think that lifting something heavy is the most likely way to injure your back? You're not alone. However, it may surprise you to know that just being sedentary can also harm your back, as can poor posture, wearing the wrong shoes or even carrying a heavy bag over one shoulder.

Fortunately, there are some simple but effective steps you can take which may help protect your back from strain and injuries related to everyday habits and activities.

These tips will help you protect your back, whatever you're doing.

## Protect your back when standing<sup>1</sup>

- Stand upright and balance your weight on both feet
- Keep your stomach muscles pulled in and your feet shoulder-width apart
- Move, stretch or take short breaks to release any tension

## Protect your back when sitting<sup>1</sup>

- Keep your stomach muscles pulled in and maintain the proper curve in your lower back
- Keep your knees and hips level and your feet flat on the floor
- Stand up and move around periodically to stretch tight muscles and give them a chance to relax

## Protect your back when using a computer<sup>2</sup>

- Keep your shoulders relaxed and down and your head directly over your shoulders, about an arm's length from the screen
- Elbows and wrists are relaxed, with elbows at just more than a right angle
- Take a break from the keyboard or mouse every 10 to 20 minutes. This could be standing up, stretching, drinking water or simply taking your hands off the keyboard or mouse

### **Protect your back when lifting heavy objects<sup>1,3,4,5</sup>**

- Squat down with your feet shoulder-width apart and your back straight to pick up the weight. This lets you lift with your legs, which are much stronger than your back.
- Hold your tummy in, brace your back and look up as you lift
- Always lift and carry heavy objects close to your body
- Never twist and bend at the same time
- Be sensible: get help to lift objects that are too heavy to lift on your own

### **Protect your back when sleeping<sup>1</sup>**

- If you sleep on your back, place a pillow under your knees to help you maintain the natural curve of your back
- Sleep on your side with your knees bent if you can

Whatever you do, think about your back. Good posture and back-friendly habits will help to prevent problems.

More information on looking after your back and what to do if you experience pain is available through our Beating Back Pain campaign.

1. [University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust | Back pain prevention \(uhb.nhs.uk\)](http://uhb.nhs.uk)
2. [Desk health ergonomics — Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust \(chelwest.nhs.uk\)](http://chelwest.nhs.uk)
3. [Safe Lifting for Parents and Carers of children with additional needs \(torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk\)](http://torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk)
4. [705-Top 10 Tips for Back Pain.pdf \(backcare.org.uk\)](http://backcare.org.uk)
5. [Manual Handling: Health and Safety \(hse.gov.uk\)](http://hse.gov.uk)

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