

You Only Have One Back – it needs protection

Our back provides us with the ability to stand or sit upright; it stabilizes our heads and as it protects the spinal cord. The spinal cord carries the nerve signals to go to our muscles.

There are 24 bones, discs between the bones, ligaments between the bones and muscles which allow the whole structure to move.

Back injuries are exceptionally common. Hurting our backs comes from:

- Standing or sitting for long periods
- Working in cramped position
- Pushing or pulling objects especially those that are heavy or awkward
- Stretching and reaching repeatedly
- Lifting and twisting at the same time
- Whole body vibration eg driving heavy machinery.



Health and safety laws require the employer/PCBU to reduce the risk of back injuries. Hazardous Manual Handling Regulations:

- ACT, Commonwealth, Qld, NT, NSW, SA, Tas.
 - Work Health & Safety Regulations 2011: Regs 34-38, 60 & 61
- Victoria OHS Regulations 2017: Regs 26 to 28
- Western Australia OS&H Regulations 1996: Regs 3.1, 3.4

Common ways to reduce the risk of back injuries include:

- Design and use mechanical aids – hospitals have been able to reduce the risks of back injuries in nurses!
- Use slings and hooks to move loads
- Reduce the weight of objects to be handled
- Reduce the horizontal and vertical distances load has to be shifted
- Lowering objects is less strain than lifting
- Pushing is less demanding than pulling
- Design work to remove bending and twisting.

There is plenty of advice in the Code of Practice for Hazardous Manual Handling.

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