

SAFETY MATTERS



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Overexertion

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) overexertion injuries are among the most costly and disabling work-related injuries in the United States. They are responsible for billions in direct costs to U.S. employers, more than any other type of injury.

How Overexertion Injuries Occur

Overexertion injuries are often defined as those related to lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying or throwing and occurs when a person works beyond his or her physical capacity. This could include: poor physical condition, aging/loss of body flexibility, and obesity. Overexertion injuries fall into two categories – sprains (stretching or tearing ligaments) and strains (stretching or tearing tendons or muscles). These types of injuries have been associated with lifting, bending/twisting, pushing/pulling, carrying, reaching, and poor posture.

Reducing the Risk of Overexertion Injuries

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has been involved in educating employers on reducing the risk of overexertion injuries.

Their suggestions include:

- Identify all of the tasks employees perform that could result in shoulder, back or other overexertion-related injuries. Once identified, determine whether there are ways to modify the work environment or change how tasks are performed in order to reduce the risk.
- Provide manual or mechanical lifting devices to assist employees with heavy loads. Such devices may include dollies, carts, hand trucks, forklifts, etc.
- Prohibit employees from manually lifting or carrying loads that weigh 50 pounds or more. Require them to use a lifting device or to get assistance from a co-worker.
- Ensure that any lifting requirements are part of the job description when hiring new employees.
- Require employees to take short breaks when lifting is a regular part of their job. Employees are more productive when they are not fatigued, so allowing short, frequent breaks can also increase productivity.
- Encourage early reporting of work-related overexertion injuries. Early treatment for an employee back injury or other overexertion-related injury can reduce the risk of recurrence and reduce workers' compensation claims costs.

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IMPORTANT POINTS

- Overexertion injuries are among the most costly and disabling work-related injuries.
- Overexertion injuries resulting in shoulder and back injuries are the leading musculoskeletal disorder complaint. These injuries are the most costly and frequently the basis for most lost time from work.

For more safety resources, visit www.NFIB.com/safetymatters

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