



KEEP SAFE

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Sprains and strains

Injuries resulting from overexertion while lifting, pushing and pulling are among the most frequent types of spine-related injuries. Such injuries, along with accidental slips, trips and falls, can result in sprains, strains, hernias and lower back pain. “Strain” refers to an injury to a muscle, occurring when a muscle-tendon unit is stretched or overloaded. “Sprain” refers to an injury to a ligament, and the diagnosis of back sprain (whether lumbar or cervical) implies that the ligamentous and capsular structures connecting the facet joints and vertebrae have been damaged.

Statistics show that back problems are second only to headaches as the most common medical complaint, and exceeded only by the common cold as the greatest cause of lost workdays. Back injuries alone cost American industry \$10-14 billion annually in workers compensation costs and about 100 million lost workdays.

Only a small percentage of all serious back injuries are true sprains, strains or fractures. Most are the result of degeneration of the spine caused by aging and abuse. Most back injuries, however, occur in the 24 to 40 year old age group.

Causes

If ligaments and muscles are weak, discs in the lower back can become weakened. With excessive lifting, a sudden movement or a fall, a disc can rupture. After years of back abuse, or with aging, the discs may simply wear out and you may live with chronic pain for several years. However, back pain caused by a muscle strain or a ligament sprain will normally heal within a short time and may never cause further problems.

Poor physical condition, poor posture, lack of exercise and excessive body weight contribute to the number and

severity of sprains and strains. Degeneration of the spine, due to aging, is also a major contributor to lower back pain, but it is often misdiagnosed as a sprain or strain.

Prevention

Back injuries can be reduced by improving physical conditioning, building stronger muscles to hold the spine in proper posture, and providing less body weight for the back to support.

One way to reduce back problems is by modifying your work practices. Instead of lifting heavy objects, consider mechanical means. When doing physical work on the job or around the house or yard, you should try to maintain proper posture. Prolonged sitting or standing, particularly in forward, bent or slouched positions, can cause muscle fatigue, which can lead to leg and back problems. Attempting to lift or otherwise physically move one heavy object, or repetitive moves of even light weight objects, are other causes of sprains and strains, as are slips, trips, falls and jumps.

The following are ways to modify work practices so you will remain strong and healthy:

- Lift objects carefully, not in the quickest or easiest way.
- Lift, push and pull with your legs, not your arms or back.
- When changing direction while moving something, turn with your feet, not your waist.
- Sit in your car as you sit in a chair, with your knees slightly above your hips. Also, provide support for your lower back.
- When carrying heavy objects, carry them close to you and avoid carrying them in one hand.
- When stepping down from a truck, SUV or other high platform, step down backward, not forward.



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Diagnosis

In most cases, it will be necessary for your doctor to investigate the source of your pain with the aid of radiographic studies or laboratory analysis, in order to rule out more serious conditions.

Treatment

Treatment options for back sprains and strains aim first to relieve pain and reduce inflammation, so your back can heal and you can resume at least limited normal activities. In addition to pain medications and muscle relaxants, physical therapy is often prescribed to relieve pain, strengthen supporting musculature and provide training in injury prevention.

— New York-Presbyterian Hospital

Upcoming Loss Control schools

Transformer School (Fredericksburg)	January 15 – 18
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Livingston)	January 29 – February 1
Troubleshooting School (Merkel)	February 5 – 8
Regulator, Recloser, Capacitor School (Gonzales)	February 19 – 22
Advanced Pole Climbing School (Gonzales)	March 4 - 7
Underground School (Quitman)	March 24 - 28
Basic Pole Climbing School (Quitman)	March 25 - 28



*Best Wishes
For a Safe
and Happy
Holiday Season*

Loss Control school price reduction

TEC Loss Control is pleased to announce that in 2008 the Loss Control school registration fees will be reduced by \$100 per student.

2008 Loss Control School Registration Fees

\$425 – Member
\$725 – Non-Member

Choose safe toys for children

Toys bring joy and laughter at holiday time for children of all ages. But a poorly constructed or age-inappropriate toy can bring harm to little boys and girls. The American Academy of Pediatrics has released tips for keeping children safe and happy this season.

■ Toys should be matched to a child's abilities. The manufacturer's recommendations serve as a useful guide. A toy that is too advanced or too simple for a child may be misused, which can lead to injury.

■ Think BIG when choosing toys. All toy parts should be larger than the child's mouth to prevent injuries, including choking. Before buying a toy, read the instructions and the age recommendation.

■ To avoid risk of serious eye or ear injury, avoid toys that shoot small objects in the air or make loud or shrill noises. Hold the noise-making toy next to your ear to determine whether it will be too loud for a child's ears.

■ Look for sturdy toy construction. The eyes, nose and other small parts on soft toys and stuffed animals should be securely fastened.

■ Avoid toys with sharp edges. Never buy hobby kits, such as chemistry sets, for any child younger than 12 years old. Provide proper supervision for children 12 to 15 years of age. Tips of arrows or darts should be blunt, made of soft rubber or flexible plastic and securely fastened to the shaft.

— Today's Supervisor
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