

THE MCINTYRE GROUP
INSURANCE BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

For Your Safety



Teach Your Employees the Three Ps to Prevent Workplace Back Pain

Given that back pain is one of the most common reasons that U.S. employees give for missing work, it should be a major concern for employers. The American Chiropractic Association reports some 31 million Americans experience low-back pain at one point or another during a year.

Back pain, although common, isn't necessarily always serious in nature. In fact, most cases aren't a symptom of an infection, cancer, inflammatory arthritis, or some other serious condition. Instead, most cases of back pain are mechanical in nature.

By training employees to follow the three Ps, employers can help employees avoid mechanical back pain and any resulting work absences and costly doctor visits:

1. Prevention

Believe it or not, the shoes an employee wears not only impacts the health of their feet, but also their legs, hips, and back. Shoes have a role in an employee's ability to maintain a healthy posture during walking, standing, and sitting activities. Additionally, shoe choice also plays a large role in slips and falls, which are frequent causes of workplace back injuries. Here are a few tips to share with employees:

- Never wear unsupported or unstable shoes.

- There's more surface area on shoes with a wedged bottom, which can help support the foot and make it safer and easier to walk briskly.

- Pay attention to the type of surface being walked on. Linoleum, various types of tile, marble, hardwood, and such offer little traction. Wear shoes with non-slip soles or that aren't smooth on the bottom.

- Never wear shoes that are inappropriate for a job, such as open-toe shoes when climbing ladders or walking over grates.



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2. Posture

The muscles in the back can become fatigued and injured when an employee stands with a swayed back or slouches. This posture exaggerates the natural curvature of the back, which is an unnatural and stressful position. The following techniques can help employees improve their posture:

- Hold reading materials at eye-level, not chest-level.
- Periodically rest one foot on a small stool when long periods of standing are required.
- Objects being worked with should be at a comfortable, ergonomic position.
- An occupant of a chair should position it so that their feet are flat on the floor.
- Keep back pockets empty of wallets, keys, and cell phones when sitting so that the back will be properly aligned.
- Chairs without lumbar support can be modified to support the lower back with a small pillow or rolled towel.

3. Planning

Cluttered, disorganized work areas can frequently

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cause back pain. Initiate a movement to help employees reorganize their work areas to prevent repetitive, useless, and/or unduly stressful movements. Equipment should be organized so that it's easily accessible for users and doesn't make them twist and stretch to reach it. Here are some ideas:

- Encourage employees to use speakerphone, a shoulder rest extension, or a headset when they're frequently on the phone. These tools can help prevent employees from becoming stationary too long and/or cradling the phone between their ear and shoulder, which are two common culprits of both neck and back pain.
- Ensure all employees doing frequent, prolonged computer work have their computers positioned so that the screen can be read without tilting the head up or down and discs can be inserted without undue strain.
- Have an accessible space available for employees to safely store their bags, briefcases, purses, and so forth so that they aren't frequently carrying these items around with them.
- Display clear "how to" postings on proper body mechanics for lifting objects. Even office workers can sometimes be lifting heavy boxes of supplies and such that could injure their back if not lifted properly.



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