Pinnacol Assurance wants you to know about:

BODY MECHANICS FOR MATERIAL HANDLERS

If your job requires lifting and moving things, you may already know about safe lifting techniques. But lifting is only one aspect of material handling. How you carry and put down a load is just as important as how you pick it up. Reaching, pushing and pulling, and using mechanical aids are other potentially demanding movements that you make every day. Good body mechanics--moving in an efficient, balanced way--can help you handle materials safely and protect your back from pain and potential injury.

Safe Lifting
Lifting with good body mechanics is based on these basic steps:

- Think about the load. Ask yourself if you can lift it alone, or if you need help from a co-worker or mechanical aid. If you can lift it alone, continue with the following steps.
- Bend from the knees, not the waist. This helps you keep your balance and lets the strong muscles in your legs do most of the work.
- Keep your back in neutral position. There’s no one neutral position for everyone. Your neutral position is where your back feels most comfortable. To find it, stand with your knees bent and legs a bit apart. Tilt your pelvis forward and back until you find the position that feels most stable. Tighten your stomach muscles to keep your back in this position while lifting and putting down objects.
- Hug the load close to you. Lifting even a slight weight can hurt your back if you hold the load too far from your body. Instead, hug the object you’re lifting as close to you as possible.
- Lift with your legs. They’re better able to do the work of lifting than your back.
- Avoid twisting motions. Twisting your torso while lifting, or while holding a heavy load, is a sure way to strain your back. Always lift without twisting. If you have to move with your load, get your feet and legs into the action. Move your torso as one solid unit (holding your neutral position) bend your knees, point your leading foot in the direction you want to go, and step toward your destination.
- When you put a load down, bend at the knees and slowly slide the load down your body until you can comfortably release it.

Reaching
Reaching for supplies in high places can hurt if you reach too high or grab something that’s too heavy. Be sure to reach only as high as you can without stretching, and use a stool if necessary. Test the weight of the load before you actually lift it. Contract your stomach muscles to keep your back in neutral position, and let the muscles in your legs and arms do most of the work.

Pushing And Pulling
These motions can be hard on your back. Just as you do while lifting, stay close to your load and hold your neutral back position to protect yourself. Tighten your stomach muscles when pushing. Push whenever you can—it’s much easier than pulling.

Mechanical Aids
You can’t lift every load yourself, and some loads are even too heavy or too awkward for two to handle. Carts, bins, hand trucks, dollies, and forklifts can help. Pushcarts and bins are useful for light, awkward loads, while hand trucks and forklifts can help you move heavier, stackable material. When you use mechanical aids, be sure that the load is secured in place before moving.

Make It A Habit
Back injuries are all too common among material handlers. But they’re not inevitable. It takes only a little more time to lift and move objects safely. Make good body mechanics a habit, and the time you invest will pay off in a healthier and happier back!