

## Back Injury Prevention: Script

Agsafe, Coalition for Health and Safety in Agriculture<sup>1</sup>

The following safety module is intended to be used as a refresher safety awareness session and is in no way to be used as a substitute for job training nor proper equipment use.

Your backbone is made up of 24 individual bones called vertebrae that are stacked on top of one another. Your vertebrae are separated by soft discs of cartilage that perform as shock absorbers for your vertebrae, and also help your back to bend, twist and move around. Most of the support to your spine is maintained by your stomach muscles, as well as the many muscles and ligaments that run up and down the length of your back.

The safety modules may be used by anyone with the understanding that credit be given to AgSafe.

### LEARN TO PREVENT BACK INJURY

Preventing a back injury is much easier than repairing one. Because your back is critically important to your ability to walk, sit, stand, and run, it's important to take care of it. Most back pain arises from using your back improperly, so learning a few basic rules about lifting, posture and proper exercise can help keep your back in good shape. (See Figure 1.)

### EXERCISE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BACK AND REDUCE STRESS

Having strong back and stomach muscles is important in order to ease the work your back is put through each day. By doing simple back-toning exercises, you not only strengthen your back but also



Figure 1. Learn to prevent back injury

reduce stress and improve your appearance, too! Check with your doctor as to the best exercises for you. (See Figure 2.)

### LOSE EXCESS WEIGHT

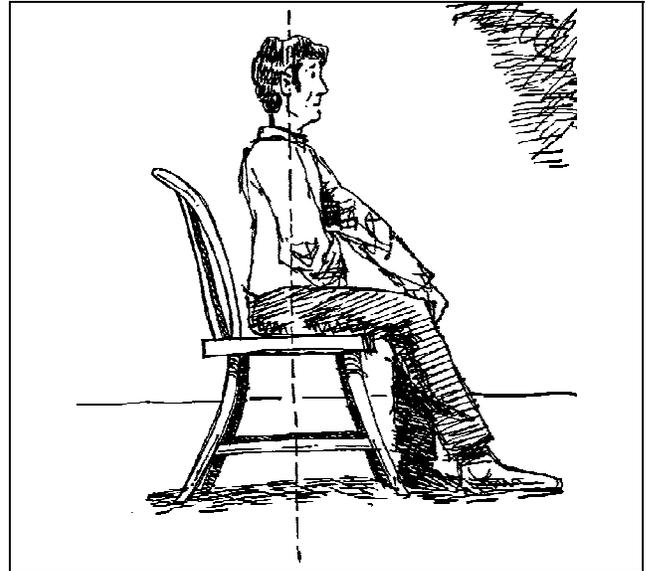
Pot bellies and excess weight exert extra force on back and stomach muscles. (See Figure 3.) Your back tries to support the weight out in front by swaying backwards, causing excess strain on the lower back muscles. By losing weight, you can reduce strain and pain in your back. Check with your doctor for the most sensible diet plan for you.

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**Figure 2.** Exercise to strengthen your back and reduce stress



**Figure 4.** Maintain good posture

**MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE WHILE YOU SLEEP AND DRIVE**

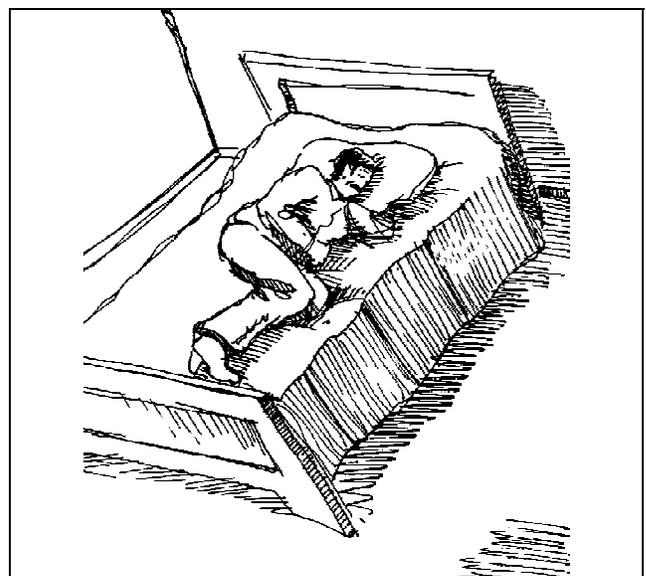
Sleep on a firm mattress or place plywood between your box springs and mattress for good back support. If your mattress is too soft it could result in a back sprain or sway back. Sleep on your side with your knees bent (see Figure 5) or on your back with a pillow under your knees for support. Drive with your back straight against the seat and close enough to the wheel so your knees are bent and are slightly higher than your hips.



**Figure 3.** Lose excess weight

**MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE**

You can prevent many back pains by learning to sit, stand and lift items correctly. When you sit down, don't slouch. Slouching makes the back ligaments, not the muscles, stretch and hurt, thus putting pressure on the vertebrae. The best way to sit is straight, with your back against the back of the chair with your feet flat on the floor and your knees slightly higher than your hips. (See Figure 4.) Learn to stand tall with your head up and shoulders back.



**Figure 5.** Maintain good posture while you sleep

## PLAN YOUR LIFT

Lifting objects is often a mindless task, and unfortunately many people perform their lift incorrectly, resulting in unnecessary strain on their back and surrounding muscles. In order to lift correctly and reduce strain on your back, it's important to plan your lift in advance. This means to think about the weight of the object you will be moving and the distance you will be moving it. (See Figure 6.) Is it bulky? Will you need help? Do you see any hazards that can be eliminated? Think about this whenever you do any lifting.

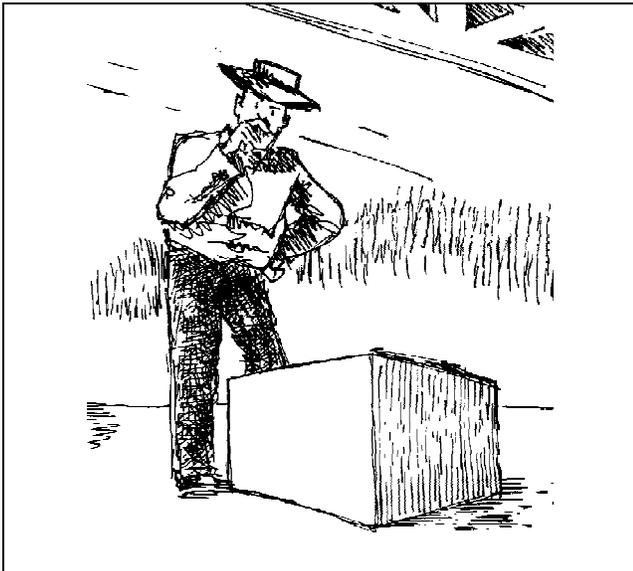


Figure 6. Plan your lift

## POSITION YOURSELF CORRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE LOAD

Once you have planned your lift, the next important step is to align yourself correctly in front of the load with your feet straddling the load, one foot slightly in front of the other for balance. Slowly squat down by bending your knees, not your back and stomach. Using both hands, firmly grab the load and bring it as close to your body as you can. (See Figure 7.) This will help distribute the weight of the load over your feet and make the move easier.



Figure 7. Position yourself correctly in front of the load

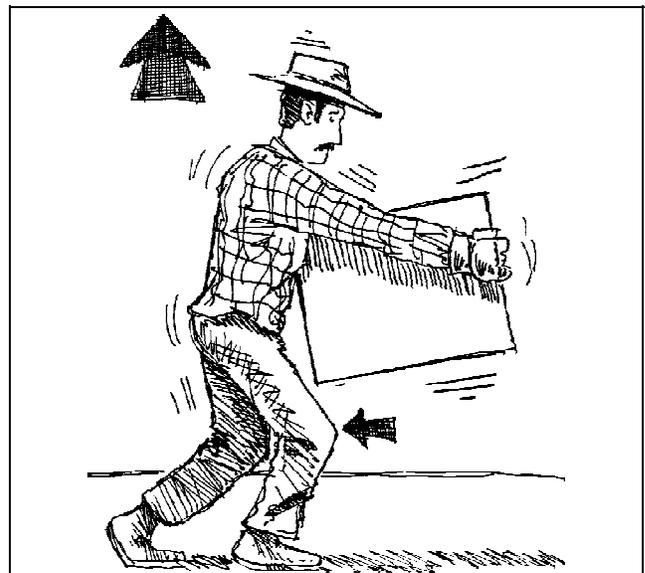


Figure 8. Lift with your legs, not your back

## LIFT WITH YOUR LEGS, NOT YOUR BACK

Once the load is close to your body, slowly straighten out your legs until you are standing upright. (See Figure 8.) Make sure the load isn't blocking your vision as you begin to walk slowly to your destination. If you need to turn to the side, turn by moving your feet around and not by twisting at your stomach.

## SET THE LOAD DOWN CORRECTLY

Once you have reached your destination, it's equally important that the load is set down correctly. By reversing the above lifting procedures you can reduce the strain on your back and stomach muscles. If you set your

load on the ground, squat down by bending your knees and position the load out in front of you. (See Figure 9.) If the load is set down at table height, set the load down slowly and maintain your contact with it until you are sure the load is secure and will not fall when you leave.

### GET HELP, IF NEEDED

If the load is too heavy, bulky or awkward for you to lift alone, find a friend to help you carry it. (See Figure 10.) If no one is available, is it possible to break the load into two smaller loads? Or, can you locate a cart or dolly to help you move it? Look for simple solutions to help make the move easier on you and your back.

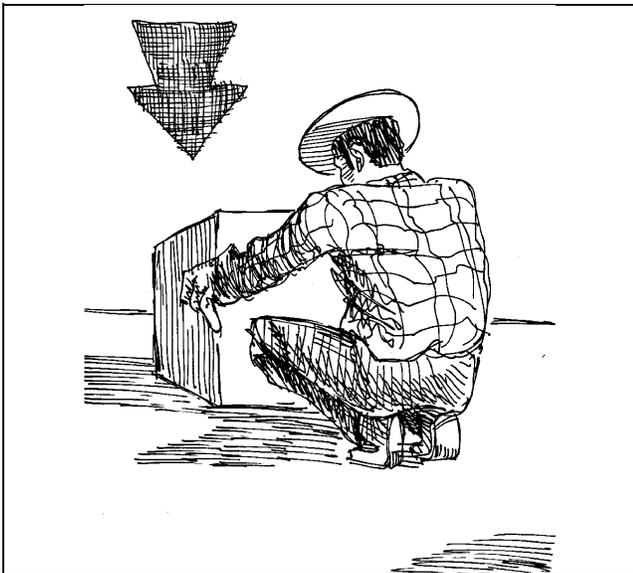


Figure 9. Set the load down correctly

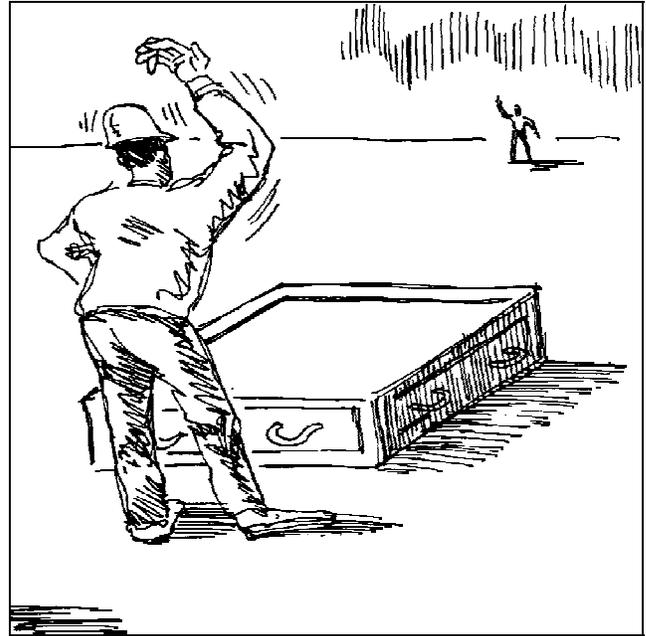


Figure 10. Get help, if needed