

Loss Control and you

Back Injuries: Understanding and Prevention

By **Mike Huss**
Loss Control Supervisor

The most frequent type of injury in the U.S. is back strain. Over 80% of adults will suffer back pain during their lives. According to a Duke University study, back injuries cost nearly \$90 billion annually.

With this in mind, it may surprise you that back injuries and associated pain can often be controlled with simple solutions like correct posture and basic exercises. Even people who have injured their back in the past can adopt certain strengthening exercises to avoid recurring injuries.

Structure of the Back:

To prevent back injuries one must understand how the back and spine are structured. The back is composed of a carefully balanced mechanism of bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons and nerves that balance and bear the weight of your body, plus the loads you lift and carry. The spinal column consists of 24 vertebrae and 23 discs that act as cushions and shock absorbers. The spinal column protects the sensitive spinal cord and is sheathed by ligament and muscle tissue. The spine has three natural curves: the cervical (neck), thoracic (upper back) and lumbar (lower back). Each spinal segment has a nerve network emerging from the spinal cord through a channel in the vertebrae that monitors or con-

trols a particular function of the body. When this system gets out of balance, or wears out, back pain occurs.

Causes of Back Pain:

Back pain and discomfort have many sources. Some of the more common causes are:

- Excess weight and poor muscle tone
- Herniated or "slipped" discs
- Muscle strains and spasms
- Osteoarthritis – slow cartilage deterioration due to excessive use, injury or aging
- Osteoporosis – a calcium deficiency in the bones
- Sciatica – pressure on a nerve root in the lower back
- Stress

Lateral (Side) Spinal Column



Home Care Measures for Minor Back Pain:

- **Apply cold, then heat** - use cold treatment first, then a warm treatment for about 20 minutes
- **Over-the-counter medications** – such as pain relievers and anti-inflammatory drugs
- **Get plenty of rest and do not exert yourself.** - practice correct posture. To rest the back, recline, *do not sit*, which will usually aggravate the problem! In most cases, minor back pain eventually heals itself with time and proper care.

For Chronic Pain, See a Physician:

Persistent back pain can signal serious medical problems. A physician should be seen if back pain is the result of a fall or traumatic accident. Other signs of serious back injury include numbness in the legs or other unusual health problems. A doctor may recommend treatment with a specialist and prescribe treatment including: back education seminars, massage and heat/cold applications, prescription medications, physical therapy and exercise, or back surgery as a last resort. Be sure to get a second medical opinion if considering surgery.

Preventing Back Pain:

Regular exercise is probably the best way to reduce the likelihood of back pain. Such activity can increase aerobic capacity, improve overall fitness and help control

weight. Stretching and toning of the back and stomach muscles can help reduce the wear and tear on the spine. Strength training can make arms, legs and lower body stronger. Walking should be emphasized, as most doctors consider it the most acceptable form of both preventive and therapeutic exercise for the back. Always consult a physician before starting an exercise program.

Prevent Injury Both on and Off the Job:

Back care training should emphasize the need to develop good habits 24-hours a day and should include the following:

- Avoiding falls
- Wearing proper footwear
- Maintaining the natural curve of the back
- Proper lifting techniques
- Taking breaks and resting if back pain occurs
- Taking time to be careful

What Supervisors can do to Prevent Employee Back Injury:

Discuss back care during employee orientation, conduct effective on-going safety training, match the right employee to the job, observe and correct improper lifting habits, use material handling aids whenever possible, study and correct any ergonomic problems, and promote wellness.

Safety & Health Calendar and News Briefs

By [Kim Coonrod](#)
Loss Control Manager

September 2009

- [National Preparedness Month](#)

October 2009

- [National Crime Prevention Month](#)
- [Eye Injury Prevention Month](#)
- [Fire Prevention Week \(10/4-10\)](#)

November 2009

- [American Diabetes Month](#)

The Hazards of Tree Work

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Division of Safety Research reports that 1,285 workers died during the period of 1992-2007 while performing tree work or maintenance. Struck-by incidents were the top cause of fatalities with 546 deaths reported, followed by falls (441 deaths), and exposure to electricity (174 deaths). Tree trimming and pruning was the most frequent operation resulting in a fatality, accounting for 569 deaths, followed by tree felling (300) and clearing/removal work (114).

The study, published in the April 24, 2009 issue of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR), concluded that additional guidance from NIOSH, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and others is needed to prevent fatalities in the tree care industry.

[Read the full report in MMWR.](#)

Video Offers Fire Extinguisher Instruction

The Fire Equipment Manufacturers' Association has published a brief video demonstrating the proper usage of a portable fire extinguisher. The two-minute video, appropriate for both workers and homeowners, also includes a brief outline of the types of fire that can be controlled with a portable fire extinguisher and a checklist of immediate action to take in the event of a fire. The video is available online via [YouTube](#).



Demonstrating the value of Personal Protective Equipment

Lessons from Losses: Safety Video Library

By [Courtney Rosengartner](#)
Loss Control Coordinator

Loss: An auto repair technician sustained a cumulative injury to his wrist as a result of repetitive motion using hand tools in the shop. As a result, he now suffers from Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

Lesson: Cumulative injuries develop over years of exposure. Preventing these injuries can save thousands of dollars in medical bills, lost time, and administrative expense. Some simple steps can help prevent the occurrence of these injuries in the workplace.

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Use appropriately sized tools, grips should fit a worker's hands comfortably and provide a firm grasp without requiring excessive force
- Maintain proper posture – work should be done at a comfortable distance, a worker's arms should not be too close – or far – from his or her body while working. Also, wrist rests should be used while typing to maintain proper hand and wrist positioning.
- Vary job tasks throughout the day – By avoiding long term repetition of one action, repetitive stress injuries can be reduced or prevented
- Take periodic breaks – Occasional breaks can reduce both mental and physical stress for workers.

By [Nick Gustafson](#)
Loss Control Coordinator

Did you know FirstComp offers a variety of loss control services? Many of these services are available to all policyholders, for free! Each quarter, we will highlight a FirstComp loss control service and how it can help your clients reduce claims.

FirstComp continues to work with the National Safety Council—Greater Omaha Chapter to provide a variety of high-quality safety & health videos to our policyholders. To get started with the video library, just contact the loss control department at FirstComp. Some of the most popular titles are listed below.

- *MSDS: Read it Before You Need It*
- *Forklift Safety*
- *Handling the Heat*
- *Ergonomics: Solving the Puzzle*
- *Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls*
- *Heat Hazards*
- *Emergency Preparedness*
- *Hand & Powertool Safety*
- *Driven to Distraction*
- *Back Safety*
- *Ready Response: Sexual Harassment*
- *Welding Safety*

For information about any of FirstComp's Loss Control Services, please call (888) 500-3344 or email losscontrol@firstcomp.com

FOCUS CLASS CODE: AUTO & TRUCK REPAIR



FirstComp covers a wide variety of Main Street small businesses. Every quarter, this space will focus on a common class code and the unique loss exposures it reflects. This issue we're focusing on Auto & Truck Repair Shops.

[The Safety Checklist](#)

[Auto Repair Safety Tips](#)

[Virtual Auto Service Shop](#)

[Service Bay Safety](#)

[Personnel Safety—Uniform Procedures for Collision Repair](#)

[Control of Dusts from Sanding in Auto Body Repair Shops](#)

[Control of Paint Overspray in Auto Body Repair Shops](#)

[A Control Matrix for Spray Painting at Auto Body Repair Shops](#)

[Virtual Collision Repair Shop](#)

[Eye and Face Protection eTool](#)

[Respiratory Protection eTool](#)

[Respirator Evaluation Form](#)

[Required Documentation for OSHA & EPA Inspections](#)

[Consolidated Screening Checklist for Automotive Repair Facilities](#)