

# TIP SHEET

**Risk Management Ideas From  
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## Back Belts Don't Work .... So What Does?

The back is the most likely part of the body to be affected by workplace injury or illness, according to Bureau of Labor statistics figures for 2001. The National Institute for Occupational Safety estimates injuries of the back cost an estimated \$20 to \$50 Billion a year. Yet in 2002, NIOSH also concluded that back belts, commonly used to prevent back injuries are ineffective, so what can employers do to reduce the incidence of painful and costly back injuries?

- Step 1: **Screening** – Studies reveal that one of the most accurate predictors of back injuries was a prior back injury. However, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits asking job applicants if they have any history of injury. You **can** ask an applicant whether he or she can perform all “essential functions” of the job. When hiring for a job requiring lifting or repetitive movements, you can ask applicants to demonstrate their ability to perform these functions. You can also require job candidates to undergo a physical examination **AFTER** making a job offer. If the exam reveals the applicant cannot perform essential job duties, you may rescind the job offer.
- Step 2: **Education** – One of the most effective ways of preventing back injuries is to train employees to lift properly. To lift properly, keep the back as upright as possible. Bring the object in close, and bend the knees. Use the larger and stronger leg muscles, rather than the back muscles, to lift the object.
- Step 3: **Evaluation** – Whenever a back injury occurs, try to determine the cause. Improper ergonomics can cause or aggravate a back injury. Instead of forcing workers to conform incorrectly configured workspaces or equipment, modify workspaces or equipment to fit the employee. Often, simple (and inexpensive) changes can make a big difference.
- Step 4: **Wellness** – Since many back problems result from gradual degeneration, employees who are fit are less likely to experience back problems than their less fit peers. Encourage employees to stay active and healthy by promoting exercise. Your options include providing on-site gyms, offering discount memberships at health clubs (many clubs offer group discount programs) and even conducting a daily warm-up session at the office. A program of simple stretches warms up the muscles....and starts the day on a positive note.

For more information on preventing back injuries and other suggestions on cutting your Workers' Compensation cost, please call our office.