

The Three Ps of Back Pain Prevention

According to the American Chiropractic Association, 31 million Americans experience low-back pain at any given time. That statistic has some serious repercussions for employers, because back pain is the one of the most frequent reasons employees give for missing work. While it may be a common condition, it isn't always a serious one. Most cases of back pain are mechanical, meaning they are not caused by diseases, such as inflammatory arthritis, infection, or cancer.

Mechanical back pain can be avoided if you train your employees to follow the three Ps:

Posture – When you slouch or stand with a swayback, the natural curves of the back are exaggerated, causing muscle fatigue and injury. To avoid putting your back in an unnatural position, use the following techniques:

- When you stand for a long time, periodically rest one foot on a stool or small box.
- Always hold any material you may be reading at eye level.
- Never lean forward to do a task at your desk, or on a piece of machinery/equipment.
- When sitting for long periods, position the chair so that your feet stay flat on the floor.
- If the chair you must use doesn't support your lower back properly, place a rolled towel or small pillow behind you so that your lower back can rest against it.
- Remove objects, such as a wallet, from your back pockets when you sit because they can interfere with the proper alignment of the muscles in your back.

Prevention – Your shoes not only impact your ability to maintain a healthy posture while sitting, standing and walking, but they can also cause falls that result in back injuries. To prevent the risk of a fall, never wear unsupported shoes. Shoes that have a wedged bottom offer more surface area that can support the foot, making it easier to walk, especially if you are doing so at a quickened pace. Most floor surfaces, like hardwood, marble, or linoleum, provide little traction, so be sure your shoes are broken in before you wear them to work. The other alternative is to buy shoes with non-slip soles.

Planning – A common cause of back pain is a disorganized and cluttered workspace. Reorganize your work area to eliminate repetitive movements. All equipment you use frequently should be easily accessible to limit how far you must reach or twist to retrieve them.

- If you constantly use the phone, try using the speaker feature. If the proximity of the cubicles in your office makes it difficult for others to hear you on a speaker, use a headset or a shoulder rest extension instead. These will prevent neck and back pain that results from staying in one position too long. Never cradle the phone between your shoulder and ear so that you can perform additional tasks while talking on the phone.

- If you spend long periods of time on the computer, be sure that the computer and monitor fit on the desk so that the screen can be read from a comfortable position and computer discs can be inserted without straining.
- Limit the time you spend carrying heavy briefcases, purses and bags. If you're carrying something heavy, know exactly where you are going to put it down, and whether that space is available.

