

# SURVIVAL TIPS

Suggestions to keep you healthy and free of injury

## Manual handling & back injury prevention

**Manual handling is moving things by lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, holding or restraining. Strains and sprains from manual handling are the most common cause of occupational fatigue, low back pain and lower back injuries. Back injuries account for 25 percent of all work related ACC claims and 35 percent of costs. Your employer must inform you of all manual handling hazards in your work environment, the impact injuries may have on your health and fitness and what precaution you must take.**

### **Tip 1: Avoid lifting risky items**

This includes things that are:

- too heavy;
- located too high or low for safe lifting;
- too big or a shape that is hard to handle;
- wet, slippery, or have sharp edges that are hard to grasp;
- unstable or with a changing centre of gravity, due to liquid contents (eg a partially filled drum or concrete in a wheelbarrow)
- too big to let you see where you are putting your feet.

### **Tip 2: Use safe lifting techniques**

Ensure that you assess the weight to be lifted - many people underestimate the weight of loads. Do not try to lift anything on your own that you can-

not manage with ease. Avoid lifting too fast, too frequently or for too long. Avoid lifting with back bent, while twisting or overreaching, or lifting while sitting or kneeling. Avoid carrying material over long distances without help. Be extra cautious when combining handling tasks (eg lifting, carrying and lowering).

### **Tip 3: Look out for your workmates**

Ensure that new employees, the very young and older workers, do not overstrain themselves. Team lifting shares the load and prevents injuries.

All employees at risk must be trained in safe lifting techniques.

Avoid carrying unbalanced loads, and always hold heavy loads close to your body.

When lifting heavy objects, bend your knees and hips and use your legs to rise.

Do not raise a heavy load higher than your waist.

### **Tip 4: Employers must provide safe conditions by:**

- ensuring walking surfaces are not uneven, sloping, wet, icy, slippery, unsteady, etc.;
- minimising differences in floor levels or walking surfaces to avoid slips, trips and falls;
- good housekeeping, with clear walkways that avoid clutter;
- ensuring confined work spaces do not cause poor posture;

- minimising weight of packages, sacks or bags, or bulk handling.

### **Tip 5: Use Mechanical Aids**

Always use trolleys or carts where possible.

Slide objects, such as cartons, on rollers (or automate with conveyors).

Fit automatic doors for better access.

### **Tip 6: Maintain a level of fitness**

Carry out warm-up exercises before lifting.

When reaching down, never bend from the waist. Bend from the hips and knees.

### **Tip 7: Take rest breaks**

Take into account repetitive work demands and work conditions:

- do not work at a high pace;
- take appropriate rest breaks with sufficient recovery time;
- ensure adequate lighting levels;
- if possible avoid cold or very hot and humid working conditions;
- avoid manual handling in strong or gusty wind, or wet conditions.

### **Tip 8: Your responsibility**

As an employee, you must take reasonable care of your own health. You must follow your employers' OHS instructions. Care is better than cure.

*These survival tips supplied by the New Zealand Safety Council, [www.safetycouncil.org.nz](http://www.safetycouncil.org.nz) or email [info@safetycouncil.org.nz](mailto:info@safetycouncil.org.nz)*