

SAFE LIFTING AND BACK PROTECTION

The majority of musculoskeletal injuries occur due to lifting and moving heavy, large or awkward objects. Most of these injuries involve non-repetitive tasks and may resolve over a relatively short period of time with proper treatment and rest.

High risk scenarios that can cause lifting injuries in veterinary practices include:

- Lifting large animals, supplies, or equipment that is too heavy for one person and results in forceful overexertion.
- Lifting heavy objects from the floor level improperly, by bending over at the waist, rather than bending the knees while tightening your core and keeping your back straight.
- Lifting or handling objects from an awkward position, such as under a shelf or over a counter, which requires bending, twisting, and reaching.
- Working for extended periods of time in a stationary position, such as sitting or standing with your arms outstretched in a static posture. Examples include prolonged restraining of patients or performing procedures such as dental work.
- Overly repetitious work, such as stocking heavy supplies on shelves, without taking necessary breaks for your muscles to relax and recover.

To reduce back and lifting injuries:

- Do not lift more than you are capable of or comfortable lifting. Always ask for assistance whenever you think you may need it. Set a maximum lifting weight. Require employees to get assistance if animals, supplies, or equipment are above that limit.
- At least two people should always be involved to safely lift heavy or agitated animals.
- Use aids such as hydraulic lifts, steps, ramps, or gurneys to transfer patients from one level to another (e.g. floor to table or tub). Adjust the height of tables and washing stations to minimize bending and reduce stress on the upper and lower back.
- When restraining an animal, be mindful to adjust your posture so that your back is not bent forward.
- Use a dolly or handcart to move heavy supplies inside the practice and to client's vehicles outside.
- Tilt bins to improve access and decrease bending and reaching.
- Arrange food and other supplies on shelves according to weight and size, with the heaviest items between knee and shoulder level, to minimize lifting strain on the body. Consider rearranging large food bags stacked horizontally to a vertical position to make them easier to lift and move using a dolly or handcart.
- Avoid prolonged and/or repetitive movements by taking brief regular stretch breaks.
- If you are performing a task and your back begins to tense or ache, stop the task at once and inform a supervisor that you are experiencing symptoms of back strain.
- Conduct safety training that includes back injury prevention to all new employees. Update this training annually to remind staff of the proper lifting methods and equipment.
- Before attempting to lift heavy objects or animals, check your surroundings. Check the slope of the ground or floor and be aware of uneven footing. Check for wet conditions that might cause slipping. Make certain your destination is clear and stable and that the pathway is clear.

- When you begin to lift, get as close to the object as possible. Do not reach over other objects to bring the item to be lifted close to your body; doing so can put excess stress on your shoulders and back.
- Take a stable stance with your feet about shoulder width apart. It may help to place one foot slightly in front of the other.
- After your body is aligned with the object or animal, bend your knees to reach the load. Do not keep your knees straight and bend at the back.
- Grip the object or animal firmly and come upright using your thigh muscles – lift with your legs not your back.
- While lifting, keep your back straight and rigid to reduce movement of your torso. Tensing your abdominal muscles will help. Keeping your back straight will allow the large muscles of your legs and buttocks to do most of the work.
- Lift with steady controlled speed, using your leg muscles. Lifting too quickly can put excess strain on your back.
- If you must turn while lifting, pivot after you are at a full standing position using your feet. Do not twist your back. Keep your back rigid until you have reached a full standing position.

SAFE LIFTING AND BACK PROTECTION SAFETY QUESTIONS

What is the best way to arrange supplies of animal food to avoid back injuries?

What are proper lifting techniques and when is getting help required?

What equipment is available to decrease lifting and where is it located?

What options are available if an employee is not able to lift an object safely?

What is our practice policy on lifting large or heavy animals?

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

A Preventing Back Injuries online self-guided training course is available to VISC Insurance Policy Holders. Contact VISC at visc-ins.com or call (888) 762-3143 for details. To access the training courses, go to <https://learning.syntrio.com/VET/login.asp?>

Cal/OSHA Guidelines for Manual Material Handling: https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/mmh.pdf