What makes an effective ergonomics program?

- Worksite analysis to determine ergonomic hazards and job functions that are high risk.
- Engineering controls, such as the design or redesign of the job environment and procedures.
- Administrative controls, including job rotation, rest periods, decreasing the number of repetitions per worker.
- Medical management, including past work illness and injury histories, monitoring work situations, providing educational materials and seminars on leading a healthy lifestyle.
- Training and education on job procedures; causes, risk factors and symptoms of cumulative trauma disorders, and the health effect of exposure; and reporting procedures at all levels.
- Personal protective equipment, such as back and wrist supports, used as a supplement to engineering and administrative controls.

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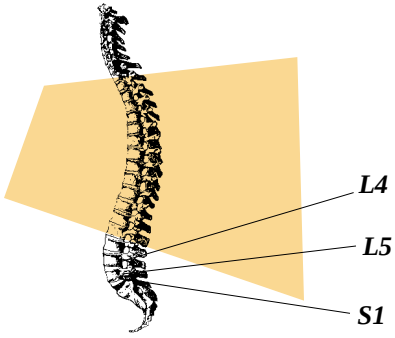
SELECTING THE PROPER

BACK support

Proper
Back Support
Selection

Supplementing an ergonomics program with back supports can be an important step toward controlling the risk of back injury. Selecting the proper back support is even more significant in achieving effective results.

Most back injuries are caused from repetitive lifting, bending, twisting and turning activities instead of from a single episode. Overtime, these activities strain the supportive structures in the lower back. It's estimated nearly 85 percent of all reported back injuries occur in the lumbo-sacral joint, or the L4 and L5 area of the lower back. A well-designed flexible back support will cover and support this region of the back.



What can a back support do?

- Back supports are an excellent cost-effective supplement to control back injury in tough jobs that may be difficult to redesign.
- Back supports provide lower back and abdominal support.
- Back supports serve as useful reminders to use proper body mechanics when lifting by reinforcing what was learned in training programs.

What a back support can't do?

- Back supports will not allow a worker to lift more weight.
- Back supports will not prevent back injuries. They are a control measure to help reduce the risk of injury. Reducing the risk factors help reduce the incidence rate. Back supports should be used with other control measures.
- Back supports are not a substitute for an effective ergonomics program. They are a supplemental part of a comprehensive ergonomics program, which includes job task analysis, ergonomic redesign, medical surveillance, training and education, and the use of personal protective equipment. Back supports also have a positive role to play in those situations where the risk of injury cannot be readily engineered out of a job, such as in patient care, hospitality, construction, or delivery service settings.

How to select the right back support

- Check for a design that conforms to the body ensuring a comfortable, secure fit. Back supports should sit below the navel and fit snugly on the hips, covering the vulnerable L5 and S1 area.
- Check for an adjustable two-stage closure that allows the user to tighten the support during lifting activities and loosen when in a nonlifting position.
- Check for an internal gripping mechanism. These devices reduce ride up and help keep the back support in place. It's best if these materials are non-conductive so the support can be used in a variety of applications and worksettings.
- Check to make sure the materials are breathable and machine washable. Inferior materials can be hot and uncomfortable to wear and may need to be hand washed.
- Check the material specifications for overall durability. Inferior hook-and-loop closures, elastic band and other critical components will breakdown, reducing function, and increasing long-term cost.
- Check out a back support company's credibility, resources and product line. Make sure they are providing the proper training and support with your ergonomics programs.