

11 Ways to Stay Injury-Free While Lifting

According to a National Safety Council study, sprains and strains account for the highest number of injuries (60 percent) truck drivers suffer each year. About 21 percent of those injuries are neck and back related.

Avoid the pain and protect your back. Use these 11 safe lifting tips when loading or unloading cargo:

- 1. Warm up those muscles.** If you just arrived at your destination, you've probably been on the road—and sitting—for quite a while. So, warm up your muscles by gently stretching your arms and legs or walking around your rig a couple of times.
- 2. Assess your cargo.** Figure out which pieces of cargo you can carry, and which might require help. As a general rule, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends never lifting items over 50 pounds without some kind of support. For anything over 50 pounds, use material handling devices (pallet jacks, hand trucks or a forklift) or ask another person for help.
- 3. Assess the loading/unloading zone.** Make sure your truck is parked safely with wheels chocked and keys out of the ignition. Clear the path you'll use to carry the cargo to ensure it's free from obstructions.
- 4. Wear protective equipment.** If you're doing heavy lifting, use a back brace for support, and wear work gloves and steel-toed shoes.
- 5. Lift with your legs.** When lifting items from the ground, stand close to the item with your feet apart. Keep your back and shoulders straight and bend with your knees. Get a good grip on the cargo with your palms and use your leg strength to lift the item.
- 6. Know the "power zone."** Manual lifting should take place at "power zone" height, about mid-thigh to mid-chest.



- 7. Keep it straight.** Avoid twisting or turning while carrying cargo. Change direction by moving your feet, not your torso. Walk forward (not backward) whenever possible.
- 8. Stand your ground.** If lifting cargo from above your head, stand on a stable surface. Bring the load down to waist level. Avoid reaching and lifting at the same time whenever possible.
- 9. Set it down gently.** When setting loads down, bend at the knees. Set down the corner of the cargo closest to you first, then remove your fingers from underneath the load.
- 10. Use the handles.** If cargo has die-cut or protruding handles, use them to help lighten the load on your back, shoulders and arms.
- 11. Take regular breaks.** Don't try to do all your lifting at once. Taking breaks will help your muscles relax.