Employment and Social Development Canada
Emploi et Développement social Canada

Fair, safe and productive workplaces

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Aches and Pains – Loading and Unloading a Truck

Do you load or unload truck(s) and want to prevent or reduce aches and pains in your lower back, legs, arms, neck and shoulders? Then this Ergo-Tip information sheet is for you.

Loading and unloading a truck can be demanding on the body and if you are not careful, it could result in a Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI). The purpose of the Ergo-Tips is to help you perform your job more efficiently by reducing or eliminating injury and pain.

Ergonomic related issue	Consider the following
Lifting immediately after prolonged driving: • Immediately after a long drive many of your muscles are fatigued, tendons/ligaments are stretched, and your spinal discs are more vulnerable to injury.	• Avoid any physically demanding task such as lifting immediately after a long drive. Before performing a task such as unloading a trailer, take a couple of minutes to stand, stretch and walk. This will allow for some recovery time for the musculoskeletal system.
Gripping: • A lack of handles or an area to grasp onto will require you to grip harder. Handling an unstable load will increase the physical demand associated with that task. This will increase fatigue in the hands and arms. Working with fatigued muscles will increase chances of a MSI. • 'Jerking' or throwing an item decreases the chance for your muscles to stabilize your joints and increases the chance of overloading the muscles.	• Be aware of the general weight of item being lifted. • Use anti-slip gloves for a better grip. • Tilt the item at one end and use the corner of the boxes as grasp points. • Use lifting straps. • Have heavy items marked. • Resist the urge to 'jerk' or throw an item. • Use two hands. • Use a two person lift for awkward or heavy or unstable loads. • Use a vacuum lift for frequent lifting of awkward or heavy loads.
Twisting at waist: • When you twist at your waist and back your spine is less stable and the supporting muscles less efficient. ****Twisting and bending while holding a weighted item should be avoided.**	• Instead of twisting, take a step to the side and square your shoulders before lifting or lowering an item. • Eliminate twisting by arranging the items in the truck to be able to move around packages so twisting is not required.
Bending/stooping: • Bending at the waist or stooping requires the muscles of your neck, back and legs to work harder to support the weight of your upper body and to keep you from falling forward. These muscles have to work even harder when you are holding a weighted item.	• Use other positions to pick up items such as squatting (for heavier items). • Try to maintain the neutral curve of your lower back. • Resist the urge to 'jerk' an item to lift. • For frequent lifting of heavy or awkward sized items use a vacuum lift.

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Forward reach: • The further the items you are handling are from your body, the more your muscles have to work to support the weight of the items and your body segments. The muscles in the arms and shoulder will have less strength and fatigue faster. • Often leads to forward bending at the waist/back.	• Instead of reaching over obstacles to lift an item, reposition items to get closer. • Resist the urge to 'jerk' an item towards your body. • Use two hands and do not overreach with one hand.
Reaching above shoulder level: • Increases the stress on your shoulder joint and over time will increase risk of a MSI. • Shoulder and arm muscles will fatigue faster and have reduced strength when working above shoulder level.	• Place lighter items higher up in the truck and the heaviest items on the bottom. • Use a platform to stand on to reduce or eliminate the need for reaching upwards. • Maintain a good base of support and do not extend to your toes to reach for an item.
Carrying: • When carrying an item, your muscles will fatigue faster as supporting muscles have to constantly work to perform the task.	• Use assistive equipment such as a dolly, cart, or hand truck to move items. • If unloading a large amount, put it on a pallet and use a lift truck. • Use a vacuum lift for frequent carrying of heavy or awkward items.
Jumping down from truck: • The musculoskeletal system absorbs a large amount of the impact force from landing. This impact force will be many times your body weight. A MSI could occur as your muscles are overloaded.	• Do not jump out of truck. • Use three point contact to exit the truck. • Place item you are carrying on the floor of truck and resume carrying once out of truck.

Pay attention to signs and symptoms:

- Pay attention to signs and symptoms as they can be a warning of a potential injury. Report any concerns you have to your manager. Common signs and symptoms may include:
  - Persistent ache or soreness in your muscles or joints and unable to move joint freely: Commonly caused by highly fatigued muscles.
    - Note that your muscles may initially feel achy or sore when performing a task you have never performed or have not performed in a long time. In many cases, this is normal as it takes time for your muscle to adjust and to be accustomed to the task.
  - Localized swelling and feeling warm or hot at joint area.
  - Numbness/tingling.
  - Sudden sharp pain while performing a movement.

Employers under Federal Jurisdiction have an obligation to assess the hazards in the work place. Contact a HRSDC – Labour Program District Office at 1-800-641-4049 if you have any questions on the *Canada Labour Code* Part II ergonomic requirements or to request a copy of the Labour Program's ergonomic publications.

Visit the HRSDC – Labour Program internet website (**labour.gc.ca**) for access to health and safety publications and the new Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI) E-tool.