

Lifting Technique Training Doesn't Do Squat



If you're in construction, you lift stuff. When I ask people what's the right way to lift, most respond with something like, "Bend your knees and keep your back straight" (otherwise known as the "squat" technique). Would it surprise you that it's been known since at least 1970 that this lifting technique can actually put MORE stress on your back than bending at the waist? It also puts more stress on your knees, hips, ankles, takes more energy expenditure, and can put you off balance? Shocked? Here's a few more shockers:

- The best quality research shows that training workers in safe lifting techniques doesn't change their technique (only their knowledge increases).
- Training workers in safe lifting technique doesn't reduce back pain, back disability, back pain costs, or recurrence of back pain. Bottom line: Training in lifting technique doesn't do squat!
- Essentially ALL the research on the impact of lifting technique training has ONLY looked at training using the squat technique. This could explain, in part, the negative outcomes.

If you are skeptical of these claims, just go to Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) and search, "effectiveness of lifting technique training on back pain".

I hope you're wondering, "Are there any lifting technique rules that make a difference?" The answer to that question is complicated by the realities of back pain. Even when the best lifting technique principles are followed, most of us will still get back pain at some point anyway. But I can still give you some valuable suggestions:

- Avoid manually handling as much as possible – use a handling device or get help.
- The most important two lifting technique principles are:
 1. Keep the object as close to your body as possible. If one side of it is heavier than the other, make sure the heavy side is nearer to you.
 2. Choose a posture that is comfortable for YOU (not what someone else says is the best posture).
- **When** you get back pain (about 85% of us will get it no matter what we do or don't do):
 1. Don't panic – it's almost certainly not something serious and it will almost always go away on its own quickly.
 2. Stay as active as possible, continuing working if you can, asking your supervisor for temporary accommodations, if needed. You will recover much faster if you stay active and stay working. Recreational activities that don't stress your back like swimming, walking, cycling, or light sports are particularly helpful to speed recovery.

3. If your back pain is from a trauma like a fall or vehicle crash, or if you experience bowel or bladder disfunction associated with your back pain, call your doctor immediately or go to an emergency clinic.
4. For most back pain you will not need medical attention, but if you have questions, **call** your doctor – they can ask you questions to rule out something serious and they will advise you on over-the-counter medications for pain, the use of externally applied heat, and other effective self-care techniques.
5. Go easy on your back first thing after getting out of bed. When you sleep your intervertebral disk takes in fluid and this makes it have higher disk pressure and be more vulnerable to damage. So, during the first hour or two after getting out of bed don't do anything stressful to your spine – this includes stretching, exercising, bending, and lifting. Try to make this a habit even when you're not having back pain.



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