Back injury is one of the leading causes of lost-time or restricted duty injuries at Colby College and can lead to years of discomfort and disability. A back injury can be cumulative, as a result of repetitive motion over time or acute due to a sprain or muscle pull. The following safety talk focuses on preventing back injuries and safe lifting procedures.

**Safe Lifting Procedures:**
The single most common source of back injuries is improper lifting. Remember that each and every time you prepare to lift something, and follow these safe lifting procedures:

1. Facing the load, position your feet about shoulder width apart with one foot slightly ahead of the other.
2. Bend your knees and squat, keeping your back straight.
3. Get a firm grip on the load, using your hands - not just your fingertips.
4. Lift steadily with your legs.
5. Keep the load close to your body.
6. Keep your back straight while carrying the load and do not twist.
7. Remember to follow the same procedures in reverse when putting down the load.

**Additional Considerations:**
There are many factors that contribute to cumulative back injury. They include:
- The amount of repetitive motion
- The maximum lifting load
- The duration the load is to be carried
- The body height, weight, strength and gender
- The position of the body to the load when lifting or carrying
Back Injury Prevention Tips:

- Whenever possible, use mechanical help to lift, such as carts, hand trucks, or forklifts.
- Stretch and warm up before strenuous work.
- Keep your back strong. Even proper lifting can cause back pain or injury if your back isn't strong and healthy.
- Exercise will also help you keep your weight in check. Carrying excess pounds causes constant strain on your back.
- If your job requires you to stand for long periods, elevate one foot and alternate legs regularly. Also, stand straight, but keep your knees bent slightly.
- Avoid high heels.
- Avoid sitting for extended periods. If you must, be sure to sit up straight and in a firm chair. Keep both feet on the floor and don't cross your legs. Also be sure to get up and stretch regularly, but never arch your back.
- Sleep on a firm mattress. Placing a sheet of plywood under the mattress can help.
- Sleep on your side with your knees bent and separated by a pillow, or on your back with pillows under your knees and a pillow supporting your neck.
- Finally, don't be a superman or a superwoman. If something is too heavy for you to handle, get help from a co-worker or use a mechanical aid.

BY THE NUMBERS:

0 the number of OSHA regulations that focus on back safety

20% of workplace lost time incidents are due to back injuries

$37,000 the average direct cost of a back injury
**Review / Discussion Questions:**

1. What activities do you perform at Colby that could cause back injury?
2. What can be done in your work area to minimize causes for back injury?
3. Are all back injuries avoidable? Why or why not?

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Questions, concerns or comments contact the EHS Director at extension 5504.