



STATE SAFETY OFFICE
HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK ARMY NATIONAL GUARD
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SAFETY MESSAGE 22-03

March is Back Injury Prevention Month

Military training can be very physically demanding. One of the most common injuries for service members is back injuries. Many service members find that their backs have suffered a great deal, whether from deployments or training. From heavy packs to weapons to every day wear and tear, severe military back injuries are a common complaint of troops. A back injury can lead to months of rehabilitation and possible surgery. Prevention is the best method to avoid serious life altering injuries.

COMMON BACK INJURIES FOR SERVICEMEMBERS

- Lumbar strain
- Intervertebral disc syndrome
- Sacroiliac joint dysfunction
- Cervical spine fracture
- Misaligned vertebrae
- Chronic lower back pain
- Bulging discs

According to a study analyzing more than 41,500 disability cases among military women using the U.S. Army Physical Disability Agency found that lumbar strain and intervertebral disc syndrome were the most preventable conditions for back disability claims.¹

CAUSES OF A SEVERE MILITARY BACK INJURY

One of the most common culprits of back injuries is training. From initial entry training to field training, to physical training to military occupational training, the overuse of the back during endurance training can wreak havoc on a soldier's spine. Some other common causes of these back injuries include:

- Physical combat
- Heavy packs (some in excess of 100 pounds)
- Overuse (running, jumping, calisthenics)
- Motor vehicle collision
- Trauma

PREVENTING BACK INJURY TIPS

- **Pay attention to posture.** When standing, balance your weight evenly on your feet. Don't slouch. To promote good posture when sitting, choose a chair that supports your lower back. Adjust the height of your chair so that your feet rest flat on the floor or on a footrest and your thighs are parallel to the floor. Remove your wallet or cellphone from your back pocket when sitting to prevent putting extra pressure on your buttocks or lower back.
- **Lift properly.** When lifting and carrying a heavy object, get close to the object, bend your knees and tighten your stomach muscles. Use your leg muscles to support your body as you stand up. Hold the object close to your body. Maintain the natural curve of your back. Don't twist when lifting. If an object is too heavy to lift safely, ask someone to help you.
- **Modify repetitive tasks.** Use lifting devices, when available, to help you lift loads. Try to alternate physically demanding tasks with less demanding ones. If you work at a computer, make sure that your monitor, keyboard, mouse and chair are positioned properly. If you frequently talk on the phone and type or write at the same time, place your phone on speaker or use a headset. Avoid unnecessary bending, twisting and reaching. Limit the time you spend carrying heavy equipment.
- **Listen to your body.** If you must sit for a prolonged period, change your position often. Periodically walk around and gently stretch your muscles to relieve tension.

Examine your work environment and address situations that might aggravate your back. Even simple steps can help prevent back injury and pain.

To find previously published Safety Messages go to our NYARNG Safety Website:

<http://dmna.ny.gov/safety/>

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