

Lifting FAQs

Is there a limit to the weight that workers can be asked to lift on the job?

There are no specific regulations that set a weight limit on manual lifting. However, employers do have the responsibility to provide a workplace free of recognized hazards (see: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/wisha/rules/corerules/HTML/296-800-110.htm>). Employees also have the right to report unsafe working conditions (see: <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Basics/Complaint/>).

There are guidelines with recommended weight limits for lifting tasks based on what is known about lifting and back injuries. Maximum recommended weights range from 51 pounds (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, or NIOSH, <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics/#lift>) to 70 pounds (American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists, or ACGIH, <http://www.acgih.org/TLV/>). Recommended weight limits tend to go down as the lifting tasks:

- Become more awkward (e.g., bending, reaching, twisting)
- Increase in frequency
- Increase in duration

L&I recommends that employers take these factors into account when designing lifting jobs, arranging storage, and setting policies on lifting. Simple calculators are available for determining appropriate weight limits:

L&I's Lifting Calculator -

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/Ergonomics/ServicesResources/Tools/default.asp>

NIOSH Lifting Equation and ACGIH Lifting TLV -

<http://personal.health.usf.edu/tbernard/ergotools/index.html>

WorkSafe BC's Lifting Calculator -

<http://www2.worksafebc.com/calculator/lhc/default.htm>

Ohio's Lifting Calculator (includes recommended limits for injured workers) -

<http://www.ohiobwc.com/employer/programs/safety/liftguide/liftguide.asp>

Liberty Mutual's Calculators for Lifting, Lowering, Carrying, Pushing and Pulling -

http://libertymmhtables.libertymutual.com/CM_LMTablesWeb/taskSelection.do?action=initTaskSelection

Does L&I recommend back belts as a way of preventing back injuries?

No. Despite years of research, back belts have never been proven to be effective at preventing injuries. For more about back belts, see:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics/#back>. Back belts may actually do more harm than good, because wearing them can lead to weaker back muscles

L&I recommends that employers reduce the physical demands of lifting tasks by following ergonomics principles.

Wouldn't training on body mechanics and safe lifting techniques prevent a lot of the back injuries that occur?

Training on the right way to lift is important, but training alone has not proven effective in preventing injuries. There will always be situations where safe lifting techniques are not, or cannot be used, such as when workers are in a hurry, or when

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an object is too large and awkward to be lifted using good body mechanics. Reducing the physical demands of lifting tasks, for example, by making the load lighter, or using a piece of lift equipment, combined with training on body mechanics is much more effective at preventing injury than training alone.

What information does L&I offer to help make lifting tasks safer?

L&I offers the following information:

- **Quick Tips for Lifting** - a one-page tip sheet on lifting techniques in English and Spanish (<http://www.lni.wa.gov/IPUB/417-055-909.pdf>)
- **Ergo tip sheet on MMH** - a two-page ergonomics tip sheet on manual material handling (<http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/Ergonomics/WhatsNew/PDFs/tipsheetMMHfinal.pdf>)
- **Lessons for Lifting** - a booklet on evaluating and designing lifting tasks <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/Ergonomics/ServicesResources/Pub/files/LessonsForLifting.pdf>
- **Analyzing Lifting Tasks** - a workshop on evaluating lifting tasks and finding solutions <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainTools/Workshops/Available/LiftingHazards/default.asp>
- **Ergonomic Ideas Bank (EIB)** - a database of solution ideas that can be searched by hazard (e.g., heavy lifting) and by industry (e.g., transportation and warehousing) <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/ReduceHazards/ErgoBank/default.asp>.
- **Video Library** - a safety and health video library with training videos on lifting (<http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/TrainTools/Videos/Library/default.asp>)

Can someone from L&I come to my workplace and help me make lifting tasks safer?

Yes, L&I offers a no-cost, confidential consultation service. The consultant will assist you to find solutions to your lifting hazards. To request a consultation:

e-mail: ergonomics@lni.wa.gov

or see this web page for contact phone numbers in your area:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/Ergonomics/ServicesResources/GetHelp/default.asp>