



EAST ALLEN COUNTY SCHOOLS

DREAM IT. DO IT.

SAFETY MATTERS

The back is a complex structure of bone and muscle, supported by cartilage, tendons, and ligaments, and fed by a network of blood vessels and nerves. The lower back bears much of the body's weight during walking, running, lifting, and other activities. It makes sense, then, that injuries to the lower back—such as strains and sprains—are common. Next to headaches, back problems are the most common complaint to health care professionals.

The difference between a back strain and a sprain

A strain is an injury to either a muscle or tendon. Tendons are tough, fibrous bands of tissue that connect muscle to the bone. With a back strain, the muscles and tendons that support the spine are twisted, pulled, or torn.

A sprain is the stretching or tearing of a ligament. Ligaments are the fibrous bands of tissue that connect two or more bones at a joint and prevent excessive movement of the joint.

Symptoms of a strain or sprain include:

- Pain that worsens
- Muscle cramping or spasms (sudden uncontrollable muscle contractions)
- Decreased function and/or range of motion of the joint (difficulty walking, bending forward or sideways, or standing straight)

If you have injured your back at work, it's imperative that you are seen by Parkview Occupational Health as soon as possible.

According to Mayo Clinic, a number of factors can contribute to back pain at work. For example:

Force—Exerting too much force on your back such as lifting or moving heavy objects.

Repetition—Repeating certain movements can lead to muscle fatigue or injury, particularly if you are stretching to the limit of your range of motion or using awkward body positioning.

Posture—Slouching exaggerates your back's natural curves, which can lead to muscle fatigue and injury.

Stress—Pressure at work can increase your stress level and lead to muscle tension and tightness, which can contribute to or worsen back pain.

How Can Back Sprains/Strains Be Prevented:

1. Practice safety measures to help prevent falls, such as wearing shoes that fit properly.
2. Use good body mechanics when sitting, standing, and lifting. For example, try to keep your back straight and shoulders back.
3. Maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight puts stress on the structures of the lower back.
4. Exercise regularly, including stretching, to keep your joints flexible and your muscles in good condition.
5. Eat a healthy, well balanced diet to keep bones/muscles strong.
6. Stop smoking. Nicotine interferes with blood flow to the muscles.