

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your therapist.

Back Care

This brochure provides helpful information about keeping your back healthy and preventing injury. You will learn about proper body mechanics and ways to save your energy. Your therapist will review this information and answer any questions you may have. We hope you find this booklet useful during your hospital stay and after you go home.

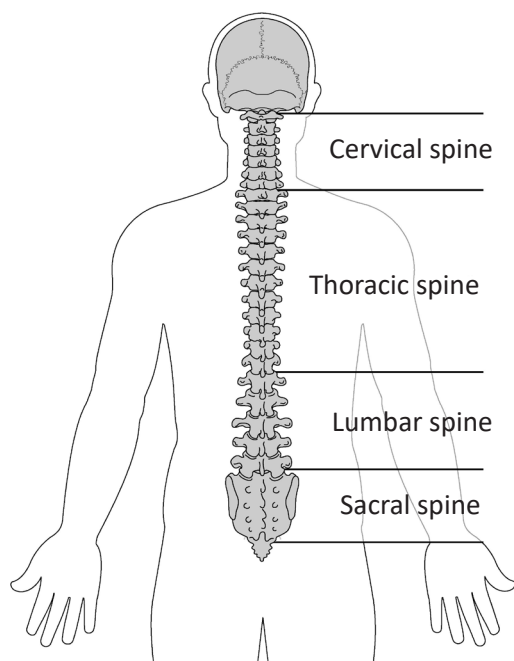
Spine guidelines

Follow these guidelines until your physician tells you otherwise.

- Limit bending forward. Avoid positions that cause you to “round” your back.
- Avoid twisting at the lumbar/waist level (Figure 1).
- Do not lie on your stomach.
- Do not lift anything over 10 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of milk).
- Avoid sitting for a long time. Stand up every 20 to 30 minutes.

Check with your physician about when you can resume driving, sex and routine exercise.

Figure 1. Spine



How to use proper body mechanics

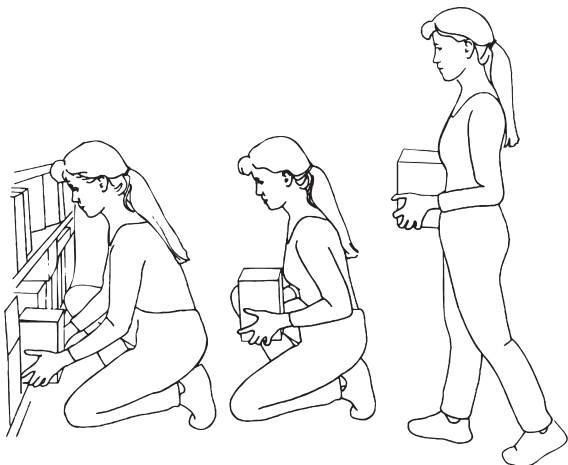
Body mechanics refers to the way you move and position your body during activities. Using proper body mechanics can help you prevent injuries to your back.

Lifting/carrying

- Avoid twisting. Do not allow the weight of objects to pull your shoulders forward.
- When carrying objects, hold them close to your body.
- Slide or wheel objects rather than carry them.
- Know the weight of the object before lifting. If it is too heavy, get help.
- Push objects (do not pull).
- When moving many items, divide the load. Make more trips with lighter loads. This will lessen your physical effort.
- Use the strength of your arms and legs when lifting objects.

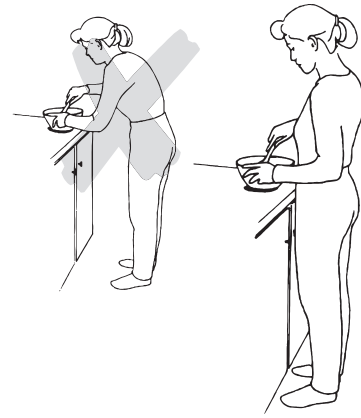


- Bend with your knees and hips. Keep your back straight to keep the natural shape of your spine.

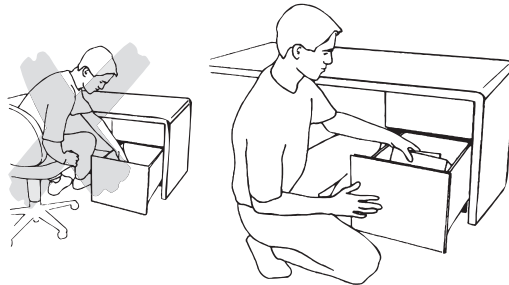


Reaching

- Organize your work area so that the items you use most often are easy to see and reach.
- When reaching, put your body directly in front of the object (between your hips and chest).



- Avoid overreaching. Do not reach further than an arm's reach away.



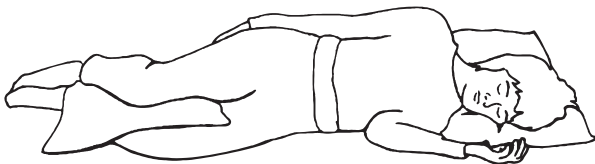
- When picking up objects from the floor, keep your back straight and bend your knees.



Sleeping

Sleep on a firm mattress.

- While on your side, place a pillow under your head and another between your knees.

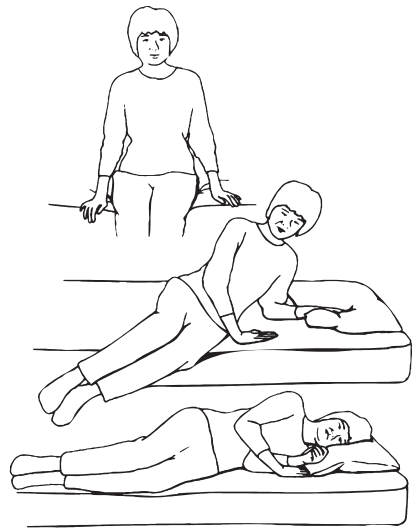


- While on your back, place a pillow under your head and another under your knees.



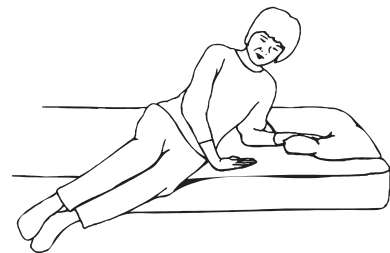
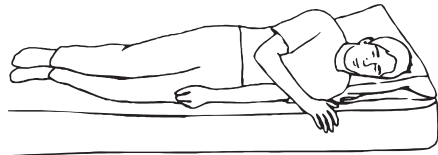
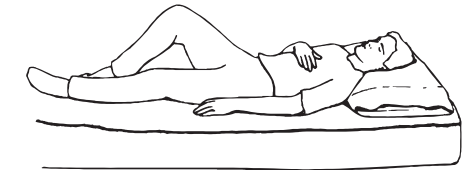
“Log roll” into bed

1. First sit at the edge of the bed.
2. Slowly move your legs up onto the bed as you lower the rest of your body on its side.
3. Then roll onto your back by bending the knee closest to the edge of the bed to help propel your body. Keep your spine straight. Do not twist.



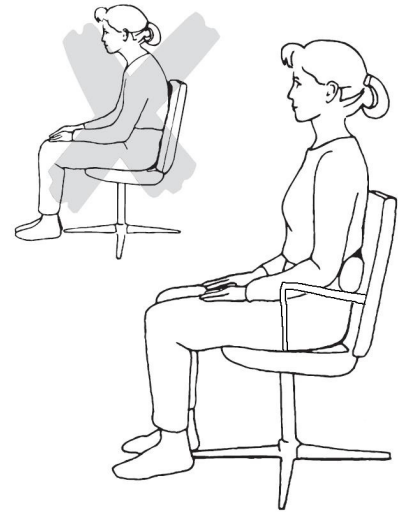
Getting out of bed

1. Bend the knee closest to the center of the bed to help propel your body.
2. Roll from your back onto your side, keeping your spine straight.
3. Then push your body up with your arms.
4. Slowly lower your legs to the floor. Be sure to keep your shoulders and hips aligned. Do not twist.



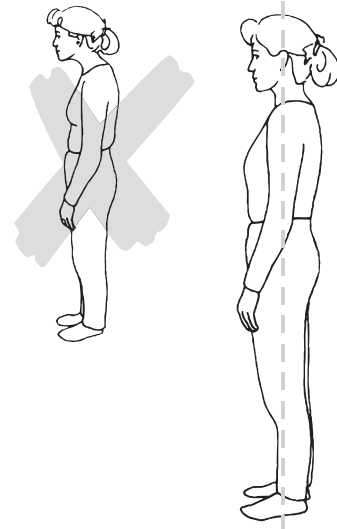
Sitting

- Sit in a firm chair, such as a kitchen or dining room chair that has arms. Your feet should be flat on the floor with your knees no higher than your hips.
- Sit with your back firmly against the chair and your feet touching the floor.
- Avoid soft surfaces that do not give you support (for example, a soft sofa).
- Distribute your weight evenly on both hips.
- Plan your workspace. Use the proper work height when you sit. Use a chair that supports your back.
- Avoid sitting for a long time. Stand up every 20 to 30 minutes.

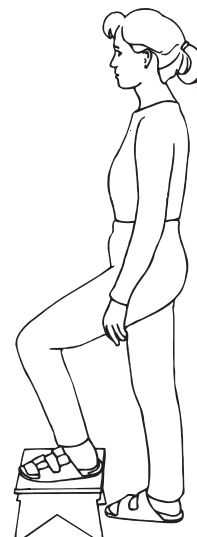


Standing

- When standing, distribute your weight evenly on both feet. For comfort, you may place one foot slightly in front of the other.



- Keep your shoulders and hips aligned while keeping your feet shoulder-width apart (do not lock your knees). When standing for long periods at a table or workspace, place one foot on a stool.



Walking

Walking is an excellent form of exercise. (Follow your physician's guidelines.)

- Remember to let your arms swing at your sides as you walk.
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Walk with good posture.
- When climbing stairs, let your legs do all the work. Use the rails for support only. Do not pull your body up with your arms.

How to save your energy

You can save your energy by using caution, shortcuts and proper body mechanics. By saving your energy and staying well-rested, you can avoid an injury.

Pre-plan work tasks

- Balance work, recreation and rest.
- Plan your time well. Mix light and heavy tasks throughout the day.
- Plan time for short rest breaks.
- Do not do unnecessary tasks.
- Avoid large, heavy loads. Do not use heavy equipment.
- Make sure you are well-rested before taking a shower. This is important during your first few weeks at home.
- Ask for help as needed.

Use organized workstations

- Have all the equipment and supplies you need within easy reach.
- When possible, avoid bending, stooping and overreaching.

If you have any questions about this information, you may contact:
Northwestern Memorial Hospital Department of Rehabilitation Services
Occupational Therapy
312.926.2526 (TTY: 711)