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GET A GRIP

Lifting materials safely requires not only lifting with your legs, instead of your back, but also gripping the load correctly.

First of all, having a firm grip helps ensure that the load will not slip. If it slips, you may make a sudden movement to catch it – reaching, bending, twisting – risking a strain or sprain to your arms, shoulders, back, or wrists. There is also the chance, of course, that you will drop the load on your foot.

Also, remember that the way you hold an object makes a difference in the amount of stress there is on the rest of your body – your arms and shoulders, your back, your chest, and your abdomen.

The first thing you should do when you are going to move something is to find out how heavy it is. Gently tug on it, push it, and pull it, so that you know how difficult it is going to be to move it. You do not want to be caught by surprise. If the load is going to be too heavy for you, or just too large for you to grasp securely or to see around, get help.

Avoid reaching out to pick objects up or move them. Handle heavy objects close to your body. The distance between your body and the object being lifted affects the stresses on your arms and back. The farther your hand is from your body, the more work your arm and back muscles must do. Keep the load close to your body, keep your arms and elbows close to your sides – they are at their strongest in this position.

This is one of the reasons we say that if the object is down low, squat down to it and get close to it. If the object is on a higher level, as on a shelf, stand close and pull it toward you to bring it as close to your body as possible before lifting it.

Use your whole hand, not just your fingers and thumb. Get your palm against it and curl your fingers and thumb around it. Your grip is strongest when your grasp comes closest to making a fist. This strong grip will relieve stress on the rest of your arm. It also will reduce the chance of letting the load slip or losing your balance.

Remember: Getting a better grip on the object, and holding it close to your body, mean that there will be less effort for your arms, shoulders, and back. And all that means less chance of hurting yourself.