



Both childcare providers and parents are at risk for injuries to their backs, knees, and shoulders because of the physical work they do taking care of children. Caregivers of young children are at the highest risk because they do a lot of lifting, and sometimes lift the wrong way. They're also navigating tiny furniture, low crib settings, tricky car seats, and they may repeat the same movements many, many times throughout the day. What to do?

1) Strengthen your core

"The core" is a general term that refers to the area below a person's rib cage and above their hips. While many people think about strengthening the front of their core (think "six pack") people often don't realize that strengthening the core includes strengthening the back and sides as well. Below are two exercises that can help strengthen your core. Hold each exercise until you can no longer perform the exercise or until your form breaks down. After an interval of rest, repeat:

- A) Pull belly button in towards spine while continuing to breathe normally. This exercise can be performed in any position by lying on your back is easiest.

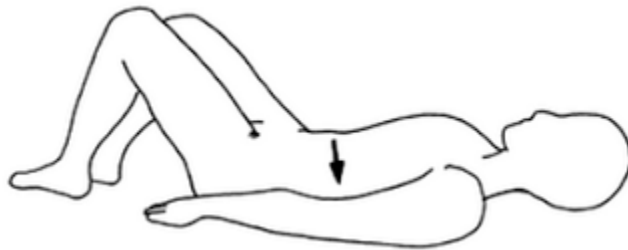


Image from Melbourne Osteopathy Group

B)



Image from Positive Health Wellness

2) Strengthen your thighs

The best way to save your back is to bend your knees, rather than your back, when you lift something. But if your legs are weak, or your knees are painful, this can be challenging. Strengthening the muscles around your knees will help take some of the impact away from your joints. Below are two exercises to strengthen your thighs. Repeat each exercise until you can no longer perform the exercise or until your form breaks down. After an interval of rest, repeat:



A)

Image from Performance Health Academy



B)

*Arms can be in any position. Remember to keep knee, hip and foot in a straight line for each leg. Legs will be spaced hip-width apart.

Image from Best Health Magazine

3) Don't twist

Twisting, while keeping your feet planted, is one of the worst things you can do for your back. Let's say you are picking a child up from the floor to place them in their crib, moving them from 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock. Instead of keeping your feet planted in place, be sure to move your feet (like the hands of the clock) from 12 o'clock to 3 o'clock as you lift the child. Your back will thank you!

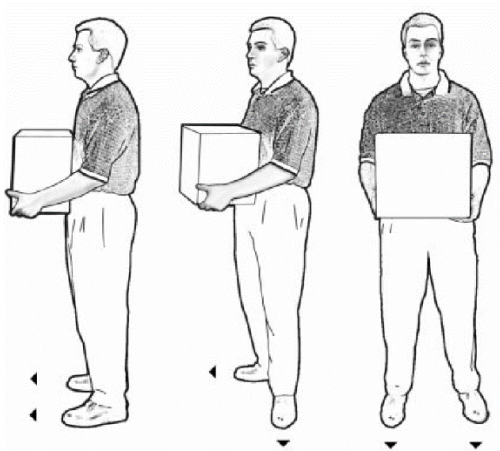


Image from Puhoi Physiotherapy

4) Keep the weight close to your body

Cribs and car seats are designed for safety and comfort, but not necessarily for the comfort of a childcare provider. That's because both require a parent or teacher to lift a child and then move the child horizontally away from the body. This type of movement is potentially risky for the caregiver's back. Below are several suggestions to help:

- A) Whenever possible, keep the child close to your body as you lift and lower them.
- B) Encourage children who are old enough to climb into and out of their car seats (be sure to stand close by to assist in case they lose their balance!)
- C) For children who can stand or sit, lower a child into their crib feet first. This will limit how far you have to bend forward.

- D) Use your core muscles to support your back. Think of pulling your belly button up and in, or of a corset tightening around your waist (see exercise #1), when you are lifting and lowering. This will engage the muscles around your core so that they support your back.



Image from Pinterest.com

Resources:

1. Labaj A, Diesbourg T, Dumas G, Plamondon A, Mercheri H, Larue C. Posture and lifting exposures for daycare workers. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*. 2016;54:83-92.
2. Royer N, Moreau C. A Survey of Canadian Early Childhood Educators' Psychological Wellbeing at Work. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. 2016; 44:135-146.
3. Wagner SL, Forer B, Cepeda IL, et al. Perceived Stress and Canadian Early Childcare Educators. *Child & Youth Care Forum*. 2013;42:53-70.