

B O D Y M E C H A N I C S

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What are “good body mechanics”?

Good body mechanics involve moving and positioning your body in such a way as to promote healing and to prevent back or neck injury. To be effective, good body mechanics need to be practiced everyday during all activities including working, resting, and exercise. In essence, good body mechanics are a “prescription” for keeping your back and neck healthy. Some important points to remember are listed below:

1. Keep your body in a balanced, comfortable and aligned position at all times. Movements and positions that cause poor alignment of the spinal column put strain on the nerves and should be avoided.
 - Avoid straight leg raising. Bend forward from your hips and knees. Bend your knees to bring the foot up for ease of dressing.
 - Do not cross your legs.
 - Do not elevate your feet or legs on a footstool.
 - Avoid driving until approved by your surgeon.
 - Sit in firm, straight chairs with arms. Avoid soft, overstuffed or low chairs.
2. Arrange work areas so things are above the hip level and below the shoulder level. This prevents bending, stooping or reaching.
 - Avoid heavy housework
3. Lie down to rest. When lying on your side, keep a pillow between your knees.
 - Use a supportive mattress for spinal alignment and to alleviate pain caused by stress on affected nerves.
4. Take frequent walks.
 - Use caution to avoid twisting of the back when walking on rough or uneven surfaces or when stepping off curbs.
 - Stay indoors during icy and snowy weather.
 - Do stairs as tolerated or as directed by your doctor. Use the handrail or banister. Go slowly.

What are “good body mechanics”(continued)?

5. Pace your activities so that you don't get over tired.
6. After your surgeon has approved lifting, bend your hips and knees while lifting.
 - Limit lifting to 5 pounds (a gallon of milk).
 - Keep objects close to your body when carrying them.
 - Carry objects with two hands and at chest and shoulder level.
 - When lifting, squat down, flex your hips and knees and push the buttocks out. In this position, the large muscles of the thighs and buttocks carry the weight, rather than the back muscles.
 - Lift with your legs, not your back.
 - In general, pushing objects is safer than pulling.

What movements should I avoid?

1. Do not twist your spine when turning: turn your entire body as one unit.
2. Do not twist from side to side. Keep your body in alignment.
3. Do not bend over, stoop or reach above your shoulders.
4. Do not engage in strenuous activity without approval of your surgeon.

For more information on maintaining good body mechanics, see the Greenwich Hospital patient information sheet, “Back Precautions, Safety After Back Surgery”.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhsop.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education