



## LifeSteps: Managing and preventing back pain and injuries

Health and safety go hand in hand. That's why LifeSteps includes educational resources and tools to help you and your family manage and prevent a particularly common, costly and painful problem – low back pain, which can result from injuries and a variety of health conditions.

Whatever the cause, nearly everyone at some point has back pain that interferes with work, routine daily activities or recreation. Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on low back pain, the most common cause of job-related disability and a leading contributor to missed work. The good news is that low back pain can often be avoided or improved – and LifeSteps can show you how.

### Taking care of your back at home and at work

With a little care and attention, you may be able to avoid an aching back from the start. Ergonomics is the science of improving your performance and well-being in relation to the tasks you do, the equipment you use and your environment. American Standard Companies' Safety team offers the following tips on applying the principles of ergonomics at home and on the job.

#### What does ergonomics mean to me?

Ergonomics can be described as “fitting the task to the person, not the person to the task.” The “task” could be activities done at work (driving, welding, entering data, doing construction), at home (working in the yard, cleaning house, carrying backpacks to school, doing repairs, carrying children) or even during leisure time (playing computer games, knitting, making furniture, traveling).

When we use the right tools, equipment and posture, we can enhance our performance. Think about world-class tennis players – they use the right shoes and a well-designed racket and are trained in strong, safe techniques.

When we use tools or equipment that don't fit, or use ineffective posture and motions, we can waste our efforts, become more easily fatigued and decrease performance. Eventually, this can cause discomfort or pain and, if repeated long enough or forceful enough, can cause or aggravate chronic conditions known as “repetitive motion disorders” or “musculoskeletal disorders.”

For more information on applying the principles of ergonomics, talk with a Safety professional at your location, call a LifeSteps health coach or review the ergonomics toolkit on LifeSteps Online by visiting the Employee Services area of our company-wide portal at <http://MyStandard>, from work. To view LifeSteps Online or the ergonomics toolkit at home or anywhere with Internet access, go to <http://www.asdlifesteps.com>.

### Simple steps to reduce your risks of back pain and injury

- *Be physically active.* Inactivity leads to stiffness and weakness of the trunk muscles and joints – increasing the chance of painful episodes.
- *Don't smoke.* Nicotine damages the spinal discs.
- *Watch your weight.* Excessive body weight puts additional stress on the spinal discs, bones and ligaments.
- *Practice good ergonomics.* American Standard's Safety team offers education to help employees choose the right tools, equipment and postures to avoid injuries (see left for details).
- *Call a health coach.* LifeSteps health coaches can help you understand back pain and the treatment options available (see reverse side for details).

## Things to know about back pain

Many of us will experience back pain at some point in our lives. If you do, chances are your low back pain will get better with simple treatment in 4-6 weeks or less. Just keep the following points in mind:

- If you have an episode of low back pain, ongoing physical activity will not damage your spine. In fact, recovery usually occurs sooner when your treatment plan includes a schedule for increasing activity and exercise. Check with your doctor to find out what's best for you, and call a health coach to discuss ways to stay active (see the box below).
- If the pain is severe, one or two days of bed rest may be necessary before you can get up and move around. Beyond that, prolonged rest and inactivity have actually been shown to prolong symptoms and delay recovery.
- During an acute episode of low back pain, over the counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®) and naproxen (Aleve®) may help to relieve symptoms. For more severe episodes, your doctor may prescribe stronger pain medications, but they should be taken for only short periods of time.

### If you're living with back pain

...call a LifeSteps health coach today

**1-877-LIFE-123** (1-877-543-3123)

Hearing-impaired callers,  
please dial 1-800-504-5539 TTY

A LifeSteps health coach can:

- Answer questions about treatment options ranging from anti-inflammatory medications to physical therapy and self-care.
- Help you weigh the risks and benefits if you're facing back surgery.
- Provide up-to-date and reliable information on specific back problems, such as a herniated disc.

*LifeSteps health coaches are available toll-free 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

### Back pain "red flags"

If an episode of low back pain is accompanied by any of the following "red flag" symptoms, you should seek immediate medical advice from your primary care physician or a doctor who specializes in the treatment of spinal conditions.

- Severe pain as the result of a motor vehicle accident, fall from a height or other injury.
- History of cancer
- Recent symptoms such as fever, chills or unexplained weight loss
- Pain that worsens at night or when resting while lying on your back
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Weakness or loss of sensation in the legs or groin area.

### Get back to basics

The best way to care for your back and avoid pain and injury is to stay in good physical condition – especially if you have had episodes of low back pain in the past. Almost any form of physical activity is good for your back. Walking, running,

swimming, biking, skiing, skating, golf, tennis, yoga, Pilates and health club activities – even taking the stairs instead of using escalators and elevators – can help strengthen your back. The key is to find an activity that you enjoy so you're more likely to do it regularly. And remember to watch for more LifeSteps resources that can help you adopt a healthier and safer lifestyle.

There are many steps to LifeSteps, which is a part of the company's commitment to safety, health and financial well-being. **Included in this mailing you'll find information about LifeSteps financial education resources. To learn more, visit** LifeSteps Online through the Employee Services area of our company-wide portal at <http://MyStandard> from work, or [www.asdlifesteps.com](http://www.asdlifesteps.com) from home or anywhere you have Internet access.

LifeSteps health coaching is provided by Health Dialog®, a third-party provider of services to American Standard's group health benefit plans, as part of the LifeSteps program for American Standard employees and their families. Any personal health information provided to a health coach is protected by federal and state privacy laws and will not be disclosed to American Standard except under limited circumstances as authorized by law for administration of the company's group health plans.