

which run from the lower back to the thighs. If you have acute back pain, you may need several pillows under your knees (*see p. 66*) but otherwise a rolled-up towel may be enough.

With an adjustable bed you can raise or lower the head or the foot, relieve aching limbs and lie in a semi-recumbent position if you have breathing or cardiac problems. The beds may have a vibration mode to micro-massage aching joints.

To avoid neck pain, make sure your head rests fairly square on your shoulders so the strain will be minimized. You may need one pillow if you lie on your back. If you sleep on your side, the width of your shoulders will determine whether you require one or two pillows to support your head.

# Taking on jobs at work or at home

If you suffer from backache, analyse your activities at work and at home and adapt your environment accordingly. When considering your job or a task to be done at home, ask yourself the following:

- Can the effort be minimized – for example, by asking for help?
- Will you be standing awkwardly for a while?
- Does the task entail repetitive movements such as bending and twisting? If so, work only for short periods at a time, with intervals of rest in between.
- Is the task too strenuous for you?
- Can you lift and carry things properly?

- Does the task involve constant postural stress – for example, as in painting a ceiling?
- Is there repetitive stress involved – for example, driving heavy vehicles over rough, bumpy ground?

If you decide the job is feasible, plan it out with the following guidelines:

- Above all, concentrate on the job. If your mind is distracted, or you are under pressure, the risk of back injury increases.
- Try to anticipate pitfalls before starting the job.
- Wear appropriate clothing: smart clothes may make you hold objects away from your body, putting extra stress on your back.
- Make sure you can stand properly with adequate space around you and without stooping.

- Lift and handle objects carefully (*see below*).
- Lean with your back against heavy objects to move them, instead of pushing with your arms.
- Buy any tools to make the task easier.
- Avoid unnecessary effort: put objects on a suitable work surface to avoid stooping; use a trolley or other device to save effort. If you can lift the object easily with one hand, use the other to provide support and stability.
- Divide a big load into smaller loads. If you can't, leave it. When travelling or shopping, divide your cases or purchases evenly into two loads.
- Let other parts of the body, such as shoulders, pelvis or thighs, take the weight.
- Drop objects that are not fragile.

## Lifting techniques

When you lift anything, avoid bending your back. Always take the weight on your leg muscles. When putting the object down, reverse this sequence.

### Lifting a box

- 1 Squat down on your haunches with one foot slightly in front of the other and the object between your knees. Grasp the object firmly with your hands – place one hand under it with that arm straight, and steady it with the other arm.



- 2 Keep your back straight and lean forwards slightly. Stand up in one smooth motion, keeping the object close to you and taking the weight on your legs. Do not bend your back as you stand up.



- 3 When you carry an object, always keep its weight close to your body.



## Lifting a long load

- 1 Squat down with one leg in front of the other and one end of the load between your feet. Put both hands under the end nearest you.

- 2 Raise one end of the load until it is vertical, and rest it against your shoulder. Shift one hand if necessary to prevent the load toppling over.

- 3 Grip the load firmly underneath with your other hand. Stand up, keeping your back straight, and taking the weight with your legs.



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