

Amazon deliveries got you down? Here's some tips on how to lift those heavy boxes safely!

For many of us, Amazon has become a big part of our online shopping routine and it's easy to see why. With fast shipping and ease of access, it's no surprise Amazon currently ships 1.6 million packages a day. However, what happens when your package arrives and it's larger, heavier, or more awkwardly shaped than expected? Likely, you convince yourself you've got it, it's just a box after all. Before you know it, you feel a sharp pain in your back, you feel "stuck" or you set the box down and think, "Well, THAT was a mistake". It can be incredibly frustrating to "throw your back out" over a simple Amazon box. Unfortunately, it's all too common and something we see a lot in our clinic.

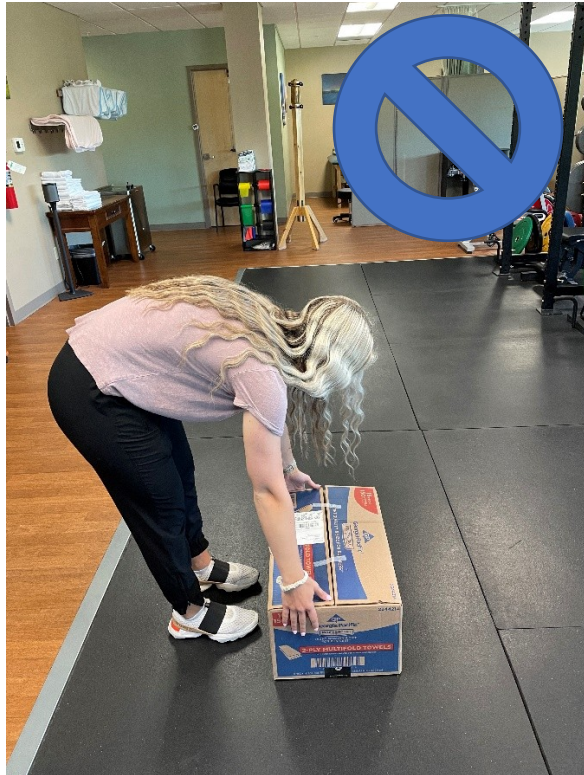
We wrote this article to discuss some easy ways to modify your lifting techniques, build up better strength, and work smarter instead of harder. This way, the next time you have a pile of Amazon boxes that need carried in the house, the only thing hurting will be your wallet.

Lifting techniques to reduce your risk of back pain/injury

1. Lift with your legs, core and back as a unit

You've likely heard the phrase "lift with your legs and not your back" at some point. While this is well intentioned advice, it's a bit oversimplified. The phrase comes from the idea of utilizing your leg muscles to help get the object off the floor instead of asking your back muscles to do all the work. Your legs house some pretty large muscles, including your quadriceps and hamstring muscles that make up the front and back of your thighs. However, the largest muscle in your body is actually your gluteus maximus, more commonly known as your butt muscles. So, it makes a lot of sense to utilize these powerhouse muscles to help you get that heavy box off the ground.

Unfortunately, there's no way to avoid using your back muscles when lifting something off the floor, so it's not realistic to just lift with our legs. Instead, we want to focus on engaging our core muscles to provide some assistance and balance to the trunk as our back muscles engage to bring us upright from the bent over position. This will allow those muscles to work together to help lift the box, without transferring all the load to your back, causing that dreaded low back pain or intense feeling of "throwing your back out".



2. Keep the box close to your body and maintain a wider stance

When lifting objects off the floor, it can be tempting to just reach down and pick it up. However, if you take a few extra minutes to set yourself up in a more ideal position, you can save yourself and your body a lot of pain. When lifting an object from the floor, you want to position yourself so your legs are at least shoulder width apart, and the object is close to your chest. This will keep the object within your Base of Support, as well as keeping your center of gravity close to the object, putting far less strain on your spine. Bending at your knees as well as your waist will also allow those strong leg and butt muscles to assist with the lift, easing the strain on your back.



3. Engage your core more

Many times, when someone ends up with a back injury from lifting an object off the ground, it's because they didn't take the time to engage their core before lifting. By engaging your core before you begin lifting an object, you are creating a better pressure system through your body. This in turn will prevent the back muscles and spine from taking on more load than they are meant to. So, how do we do this? A simple way to begin using your core more is to simply think about pulling your belly button to your spine and tensing your lower abdominals before you begin the lift. Over time, this will become second nature and you won't even have to think about it. No guarantees on a six pack, but you'll definitely feel stronger and more stable!

4. Don't twist or you may shout

Let's say you were able to get the box off the ground, but now you need to place it on the counter-top or table nearby. You already put all the work in to lift the box, and maybe you even used our tips above to make sure you avoided injury during the initial lift. It can be easy to get lazy at this point and save time by simply twisting your body to place the box next to you. However, this is a mistake that can lead to pain and injury. Instead of keeping your body forward as you rotate your trunk to the side, make sure you turn your whole body as a unit. Try to focus on keeping the box close to you as you step right up to the surface and gently set the box down.



Final Thoughts

Getting an Amazon or delivery package should be exciting, not create fear and dread as you wonder how you can possibly lift that heavy box and get it into your house. However, if you follow our simple tips above, you will not only lift those heavy boxes while keeping your back and dignity intact, but you'll also find you can get your legs, core and back stronger and better able to tolerate heavy lifting, carrying and reaching without increased pain or fear of injury. So, next time your late-night shopping spree results in a pile of heavy boxes on your doorstep, give some of our tips a try and let us know how it goes!

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