



# Safe lifting in the veterinary setting

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## Trainer's overview

To help your employees get the most out of their training sessions, it is suggested that:

- The training sessions should be conducted in a relatively quiet and uninterrupted environment.
- The sessions should be held the same time and day of the month (e.g., first Tuesday at 12:30 p.m.).
- Employee handouts should be given out along with writing utensils.
- The trainers guide, employee handout, and any references are reviewed.
- The sessions are kept to a maximum of 20 minutes.
- Personal examples of incidents or prevention techniques that worked for you should be included.
- Ensure all employees who are present will sign the safety training sign-in sheet for documentation purposes.
- If some employees were not present, then a second training session should be given. Show examples of proper lifting techniques.

## Trainer's guide

### Background

Veterinary clinics have the same potential for lifting injuries as other industries but also have the “wild card” of lifting animals.

The vast majority of back strains and sprains are temporary, and should go away in two days to one week.

The strain from lifting is still one of the major causes of injury in the veterinary clinic:

**There are three major factors that contribute to lifting strains: excessive force or weight; poor posture and repetition.**

### Proper planning and lifting techniques - prior to the lift

Determine what the weight of the object is. You can lift up a corner just to get an idea if it is something that can be safely handled by you. If you can use a lifting device such as a dolly, lifting table, etc., you should do so.

How awkward is the item to be lifted? If it is really bulky or too heavy, then you will need to ask for assistance.

Look at the area and path if you need to travel with the load. Ensure that the floor is not slippery and that the area is clear of any objects that you could trip on.

The area where you are going to put the object or animal down should also be clear.

If the animal is in pain or agitated, then consider if physical or chemical restraints are needed.



# Safe lifting in the veterinary setting

## Trainer's guide (continued)

### Executing the lift

Get as close as possible to the animal or object you plan to lift. Your leverage diminishes greatly as it gets further from your body.

If the item is below your waist, then bend your knees and not your back, to get into position for the lift. The back should be kept as straight as possible.

Keep your feet apart with one foot forward for balance. Being off balance can cause you to either fall over or drop the load.

Make sure to get a good handhold on the object that you plan to lift. This is especially important when conducting a tandem lift.

Tighten your stomach prior to the lift as this will increase your strength for the lift.

Lift smoothly, since jerking could cause a strain, especially if the animal or object is lighter or heavier than expected. When setting the animal or object down, ensure that you bend your knees and not your back.

- Hold the load close to the body.
- Don't twist the body when lifting or carrying.
- Don't reach above your shoulders to lift a load.
- Don't pull a load (push instead).
- Break the load into smaller parts if possible.

### Tandem lifts

When an animal or object is too heavy, bulky, or awkward, ask another worker for assistance.

Use tandem lifts with all animals over 40 lbs.

A tandem lift incorporates all of the safe lifting steps prior to, and during, the lift.

One person should be in charge of the lift. If it isn't known who is in charge, then the lift can go poorly.

The tandem lift must be done slowly and smoothly.

The person in charge should communicate before the lift that you will begin the lift on a count, such as "3" (i.e., count "1", "2", and at "3" immediately start the lift).

Reverse the procedure to set the animal or object down.

If one person is losing his or her grip, then let the lifting partner know and immediately start putting down the animal or object together.

### Personal factors to prevent back injuries

One of the best ways to reduce injuries due to lifting is to stay in good physical condition. Having abdominal muscles in good shape can be vital.

Never be afraid to ask for assistance if an object is too heavy or awkward. You may have to wait a short time for assistance but that is preferable to getting a strain.

### Other safety thoughts on lifting

Look around the clinic and see if the heavy items are stored low on shelving. If they are not, determine if some changes can be made on their placement.

Heavy and high use items should be stored on shelves between shoulder and waist height, with lighter items stored on higher and lower shelves.

### Questions for discussion

**Question:** Why should you do a smooth lift?

**Answer:** A smooth lift reduces the chances of a strain. Never jerk up an object as it might be heavier than you think.

**Question:** What is a tandem lift?

**Answer:** This is where two people lift simultaneously.

**Question:** When should you ask for help handling a load?

**Answer:** When the load is too heavy, bulky or awkward.

**Question:** How should items be stored?

**Answer:** Heavy and high use items should be stored on shelves between shoulder and waist height.

### Questions?

### Please complete the sign-in sheet.

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# Safe lifting in the veterinary setting

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## Employee handout

### Overview

Strains from lifting are still a major issue for clinics.

In order to reduce the chances of strains, proper planning prior to the execution of the lift is needed.

### Proper planning prior to the lift

- Look over the situation prior to the lift.
- How heavy is the animal or object?
- How awkward is it?
- Ensure that the floor is not slippery.
- Do you need two people to accomplish the lift safely?
- Can a lift assisting device be used, such as a dolly, lifting table, etc.?
- Are there objects in the way of the lift or the path that you plan to move?
- Are there doors that need to be propped open?
- Is the area clear at where you are putting the object or animal down?
- Is the animal in pain or agitated? If so, physical or chemical restraints may be necessary.

### Proper lifting techniques

- Get as close as possible to the animal or object you plan to lift. Your leverage diminishes greatly as it gets further from your body.
- If it is below your waist, bend your knees and not your back, to get into position.
- Keep your feet apart with one foot forward for balance.
- Make sure to get a good handhold on the animal or object that you plan to lift.

- Tighten your stomach as this will increase your strength for the lift.
- Lift smoothly – jerking could cause a strain, especially if the animal or object is lighter or heavier than expected.
- Keeping your back straight, lift with your legs.
- When setting the animal or object down, ensure that you bend your knees and not your back.

### Tandem lifts

- When an animal or object is too heavy, bulky, or awkward, ask another worker for assistance.
- Use tandem lifts with all animals over 40 lbs.
- A tandem lift incorporates all of the safe lifting steps prior to, and during, the lift.
- One person should be in charge of the lift.
- The tandem lift must be done slowly and smoothly.
- The person in charge should communicate before the lift that you will begin the lift on a count, such as “3” (i.e., count “1”, “2”, and at “3” immediately start the lift).
- Reverse the procedure to set the animal or object down.
- If one person is losing his or her grip, then let the lifting partner know and immediately start putting own the animal or object together.