

9 Ways to Save Your Body From Lasting Effects of Hard/Manual Labor

Good 'ol fashion manual labor can certainly be tough on the body of the working man (and woman!). In fact, the National Bureau of Economic Research States that *"The rate at which health deteriorates with age is faster in manual occupations than in non-manual occupations. For many people, work wears out their health"* [3]. Now, this doesn't apply to every person, and there are certainly health benefits to not working a sedentary job all day. However, intensive repetitive motions mandated in manual labor jobs can certainly have negative lasting effects on the back, shoulders, legs, knees...pretty much your whole body, really. Don't fret! Some simple tweaks in your daily routines, and recognizing industrial ergonomics, can help decrease the harm that your manual labor job has on your body. Here are 9 ways to help save your body from the lasting effects of manual labor:

1. Know the Ins and Outs of Industrial Ergonomics

It's important to know the benefits of good [workplace ergonomics](#) because it can help you improve the efficiency and physical damage to your body. The term "ergonomics" is derived from two Greek words: "ergon," meaning work, and "nomoi," meaning natural laws. Ergonomists study human capabilities in relationship to work demands [2]. Posture, motion, and physical exertion are all examples that can contribute to good or poor ergonomics. Knowing the ergonomics associated with your occupation can help you pinpoint the areas of your body that are most effected by the work you do.

2. Wear Your PPE



I know this one may seem obvious and I promise I'm not insulting your intelligence, but not everyone wears their PPE all the time. Because manual labor can often be unpredictable, wearing your hearing protection, eye protection, helmet, respirator, safety gloves and comfortable work shoes are vital in protecting your body from the physical harm of manual labor. Also, consider spending the money on PPE not provided by your employer such as a wrist guard, a back-support belt, or shoe inserts. Additionally, [make sure you're wearing your PPE correctly](#).

3. Know your back safety, dammit!

Your back and your core are the hardest working muscles in most manual labor jobs, considering how much you lift up and put back down. A chiropractor stated to Prevention Health that *"a lot of back pain injuries associated with lifting are not as a result of one lift alone, but a series of poor lifting habits over months, and sometimes years"*, in other words, it is habitual poor lifting techniques that will lead to the eventual breakdown of tissue and the resulting pain.

[7] Some ailments due to poor lifting techniques are: x

1. Lower back pain.
2. Pain and difficulty straightening the back into an upright position from a bent over position.
3. Pain and difficulty standing up after sitting down for any length of time.
4. Lower right back pain and lower left side back pain.
5. Middle back pain
6. Pain along the back of your thighs
7. Buttock pain [7]

Additionally, one wrong move while lifting can tear your muscles, hyper-extend your muscles, pinch a nerve or cause a slipped disk. We got your back, here's a preview of one of our DVD's that explains [How to Prevent Back Injuries While Lifting](#). Also, [here's some free back safety PowerPoints](#) for the helluvit.

4. Get massages regularly.



And no, I don't mean conning your spouse into giving you a quick, 20-minute, half-hearted rub down. I know it may seem "foofy" (as my dad would say) but I assure that going to a spa or a massage parlor to see a professional masseuse has immense health benefits; physically *and* mentally. Masseuses' are trained professionals who are not only incredibly knowledgeable about the issues with your back tissues, but they can help restore circulation to your muscles, stimulate muscle tissue, and loosen knots. Getting a deep-tissue massage in a setting that promotes relaxation does absolute therapeutic wonders for the body and the mind. Skeptical about getting a massage? [Here's a quick read](#) that addresses some common concerns people have about being massaged.

5. Moisturize

Because manual labor typically takes place outdoors, the weather can have a huge impact on the state of your skin. As does working with and around dust. Additionally, constantly walking around and gripping items with your hands such as shovels, bricks, logs, what-have-you is a beckoning for hard calluses on your hands and feet. Pair that with the weather's effect on you, and you have the perfect recipe for dry, cracked skin. Make a habit of moisturizing your body as soon as you get out of the shower when your pores are open. Some good old fashion coconut oil that can be purchased at the grocery store or pharmacy and is great for moisturizing your body. When it comes to your hand and feet, something more

intensive for cracks and flakes works best. O’Keeffe’s Working Hands Hand Cream works incredibly well. I used to use it when I was a waitress back in college after having my hands in soapy water and after touching hot plates. After using it, I was still able to grip plates and cups. It’s cheap too, at your local Walgreen or Rite Aid. Give it a try, and use it often!

6. Stretch

Stretching can help improve flexibility, and consequently, range of motion in your joints. Better flexibility may improve your performance in physical activities or decrease your risk of injuries by helping your joints move through their full range of motion and enabling your muscles to work most effectively. [5] Stretching also helps to improve circulation, improve muscle posture, and enhance energy among a laundry list of other benefits for your body. At the end of a long work day, take 10-20 minutes to do some static stretching such as those outlined in the graph below:



Image Credit: SouthShoreCyclery

7. Reduce Stress

Stress has a helluva toll on our bodies, and is virtually always lurking in our minds, even when we feel good. Reducing stress means reducing the amount of “stressors” in your life, or the things that are causing you stress. I know this is easier said than done, but one thing that helps me to reduce stress is remembering everything I should be thankful I have. For instance, is money a stressor in your life? According to an opinion poll, the major cause for stress in nearly all countries surveyed is money. [4] If money has you stressing, changing your thought patterns can improve your financial struggle. For example, stop worrying about bills, and start thinking about how thankful you are you have a job that

supplies your immediate survival needs such as food and water (more than a billion people don't have access to healthy water [1]) . Worrying about your mortgage? Stop even thinking about the word mortgage and start thinking more about the word "home". Your mind is a powerful magnet, you can attract positive circumstances into your life by simply changing your thought pattern. Greatist.com listed some science-backed ways to reduce stress that I can totally get on board with. Here are a few [6]:

1. Laugh- Laughter can reduce the physical effects of stress (like fatigue) on the body
2. Light a scented candle- Studies suggest aromatherapy can be a good way to relieve stress . Certain aromas (like lavender) have been consistently shown to reduce stress levels.
3. Listen to music- Research points to multiple ways in which music can help relieve stress, from triggering biochemical stress reducers to assisting in treating stress associated with medical procedures
4. Take a nap- Napping has been shown to reduce cortisol levels, which aids in stress relief
5. Hugging- Hugging may actually reduce blood pressure and stress levels in adults
6. Get a dog/hang with your pet- Dog owners have been shown to be less stressed out—most likely thanks to having a buddy to cuddle. (My theory for that is because pets' comprehension to only think about their current reality reverts us to that mindset as well. If you're playing fetch with your dog, they are only thinking about you throwing that ball and them retrieving it. Pretty soon, that's all you're thinking about too. Additionally, hanging out with small children also reverts us back to a simpler, less complex web of thoughts.)
7. Have sex- Laundry list of reasons why this reduces stress, you probably know most of them already. *wink*
8. Take a walk- A quiet, meditative stroll can do wonders

for stress relief, especially when we step outdoors. Try not to rush, and take whatever pace feels most natural.

These are only a few of them, and most people have ways to relieve stress that are personal to them (for me, it's a glass (or more) of red wine). Do a little research, there are countless ways to reduce the stress in your life.

8. LISTEN to your body

This is self-explanatory. Don't lift more than you can handle, and listen to the areas of your body that are over-used. Pushing your body beyond its limits isn't impressive, it's harmful. Don't believe me? Remember [what happened at the Rio Olympics this year](#)? Yeah.

9. Be Positive

I know this last one is kind of a cliché, but as adults we get so caught up in the negative circumstances in our life that we completely disregard or take advantage of the positive things we have going for us. I stated earlier that our minds are a powerful magnet that attract circumstances and situations into our lives. If you're constantly thinking about how much you hate your job, that's an incredibly powerful feeling that has the ability to attract more reasons to hate your job. Actively try to have positive thought patterns, and instead of thinking negative thoughts, try catching yourself on those thoughts and force yourself to think the positive opposition. I promise you the ripple effects of positive thoughts are more powerful than you think, and can improve all areas of your life (especially your physical existence!). Give it a try, even if you have to *pretend* to be positive at first. Soon, you won't be pretending and you'll actually have more reasons to be positive (I *promise!*) and a happy mind fuels a happy body.

-Mikaela

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Image Credit: QuoteIdeas.com

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