Ergonomic Guidelines:
Custodial Tasks
General Best Practices

- Stretching before the start of your shift and after breaks can help reduce injuries
- Work in “teams” to help lighten the load
- Take a 30 - 60 second micro-break for every 20 minutes of continuous work
- Alternate tasks between the left and right sides of the body
- Plan before performing a new task
- Work at a comfortable pace. Do not “rush.”

Stretching (Warm Up & Stretch or Stretch & Flex Program):

**Benefits of stretching**
- Stretching increases flexibility. Flexible muscles can improve your daily performance.
- Tasks such as lifting packages and bending to tie your shoes become easier and less tiring.
- Stretching improves range of motion in your joints. Good range of motion keeps you in better balance, which will help keep you mobile and less prone to injury from falls — especially in your age.
- Stretching improves circulation. Stretching increases blood flow to your muscles, improving circulation can speed recovery after muscle injuries.
- Stretching promotes better posture. Frequent stretching keeps your muscles from getting tight, allowing you to maintain proper posture and minimize aches and pains.
- Stretching can relieve stress. Stretching relaxes the tense muscles that often accompany stress.
- Stretching may help prevent injury. Preparing your muscles and joints for activity can protect you from injury, especially if your muscles or joints are tight.

**Stretching essentials**
- Target major muscle groups. When you’re stretching, focus on your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck, and shoulders. Also, stretch muscles and joints that you regularly use at work or play.
- Warm up. Stretching muscles when they’re cold increases your risk of injury, including pulled muscles. Warm up by walking while gently pumping your arms.
- Hold each stretch for a minimum of 15-20 seconds. It takes time to lengthen tissues safely. Hold your stretches for at least 15-30 seconds and up to 60 seconds for additional flexibility. That can seem like a long time, so keep an eye on your watch. Then repeat the stretch on the other side.
- Don’t bounce. Bouncing as you stretch can cause small tears in the muscle. These tears can cause scar tissue at the muscle knot, which tightens the muscle even further — making you less flexible and more prone to pain.
- Focus on a pain-free stretch. Expect to feel tension while you’re stretching. If it hurts, you’ve gone too far. Back off to the point where you don’t feel any pain, then hold the stretch.
- Relax and breathe freely. Don’t hold your breath while you’re stretching.
# Lifting/Carrying

## Follow Safe Lifting Best Practices and Mechanics:

- Plan your route
- Use mechanical aid, if available
- Move your feet to reduce trunk rotation. Keep your “nose between your toes”
  1. Stand close with your feet shoulder width apart and face the object
  2. Bend your knees, keep your back straight and look forward
  3. Lift with your legs
  4. Keep items close to your body and at waist height

## Sample Task:

### Carry supplies, linens or equipment upstairs

**Tips:**
- Leave one hand free to hold on to the handrail
- Place items in a bag to carry up stairs
- Avoid stacking items so high that you cannot see
- Use an elevator, if available

### Handling Linens

- As linens are collected from rooms, recommend adding no more than 20 linen items per bag.

### Handling heavy or large items (e.g. furniture)

- Ask for assistance
- Lighten the load
- Slide furniture instead of lifting
- Use New Haven Furniture Skates or EZ Moves furniture slides (put under furniture legs)
- Use EZ Moves Furniture Lifter when applicable

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*Furniture Skates*  
*Furniture Slides and Lifter*
Overreaching

Follow Best Practices:

- Alternate arms
- Move your feet to reduce trunk rotation. Keep your “nose between your toes”
- As much as feasible, keep your arms close to your body
- Use the right tool for the task
- Use extra caution when working in areas with a wet floor (e.g. bathrooms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Task: Retrieving equipment/supplies overhead</th>
<th>Tips:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tips:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Store frequently used items between waist and shoulder height</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use a stepstool</td>
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<td>- Do NOT stand on chairs</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sample Task: Scrubbing</th>
<th>Tips:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tips:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use tools with longer handles that allow for an upright posture with your elbows by your side</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ensure chemicals have time to dislodge residue on shower walls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use the minimum force required to get the job done.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Task: Mopping, Sweeping, Vacuuming</th>
<th>Tips:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tips:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Move your feet to avoid twisting and overreaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>- When filling the bucket with water, connect a hose from the sink faucet to the bucket to eliminate the need to lift and lower the bucket.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use a bucket with wheels to eliminate having to carry buckets of water.</td>
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## Kneeling/Squatting

### Follow Best Practices:
- Alternate knees
- Kneel/squat directly in front of your work.
- Avoid twisting and overreaching
- Use the right tool for the task
- When feasible, bring the work to waist level
- Use knee pads/kneeling mats, when appropriate

## Sample Task: Using Dustpan and Sweep Brush

### Tips:
- Use equipment with taller handles that allow you to work standing in an upright position with your elbows at your side (e.g. dustpan with extended handle)

## Sample Task: Cleaning Toilets

### Tips:
- Hold on to railings or mounted fixtures for support

## Sample Task: Tucking in Bedsheets

### Tips:
- Position yourself close to the bed
- Use both hands
- Ensure hand clearance between the wall and bed
**Group Discussion:** What is wrong in each of these pictures?

What improvements can be made?

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Do you have additional ideas or concerns? Contact your supervisor or SU EH&S at 723-0448.
For Supervisors - Answer key for Group Discussion:

Bending at the waist is improper lifting technique. Follow safe lifting mechanics and best practices.

Overhead reaching. Consider use of a doodle bug tool with a clean rag on the end, a long-handled squeegee, or a step stool.

Wear proper PPE.

Kneel or squat instead of bending at the waist.
Set down supplies/equipment instead of holding them to lighten the load.