



# Veterinary loss prevention program: Strains and sprains action plans in a veterinary setting

# Strains and sprains safety in the veterinary setting

## Trainer's overview

To help your employees get the most out of their training sessions, trainers should:

- Conduct the training sessions in a relatively quiet and uninterrupted environment.
- Keep the sessions for the same time and day of the month (e.g., 12:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday).
- Give out employee handouts along with pencils/pens.
- Review the trainer's guide, employee handout, and any references.
- Keep the sessions to a maximum of 20 minutes.
- Give personal examples of incidents or prevention techniques that worked for them.
- Ensure all employees who attend sign the Safety Training Sign-in Sheet for documentation purposes.
- Conduct a second training session for the employees who could not attend the first session.



## Trainer's guide

### Background

Injuries such as sprains and strains are common in all workplaces and include exposures from duties ranging from clerical to heavy lifting.

Sprains are diagnosed as an injury to ligaments — the thick tissue connecting bones and joints together. Common areas of sprains are wrists, elbows, knees, and ankles, occurring when the ligament is stretched beyond its normal position. Sprains may be caused by impacts, bending, or twisting that overextends a joint and ligament. Signs of sprain include pain, swelling, bruising, and loss of use of the joint.

Strains affect muscles and tendons — the tissue that attaches muscle to bone. Most common areas of strain are backs and hamstrings. Strains are primarily caused by trauma (a fall or outside force), and are noted by bruising, swelling, and even muscle spasms. Strains are classified as acute or chronic: acute strains are associated with a recent injury, while chronic strains may be a result of overuse.

Back injuries or strains are the second most common injury in the veterinary setting behind bites and scratches. No single approach will ever eliminate the potential for sprains and strains, but there is opportunity to reduce the risk.

### Who is at risk?

Each clinic must evaluate its own situation, so employees should:

- Know that all tasks, from lifting to clerical work, have injury potential
- Make work areas as ergonomically sound as possible
- Take advantage of opportunities for assistance from coworkers or machines when doing any lifting
- Be aware of activities involving repetitive motion
- Know the location of a first aid kit
- Know the techniques to properly lift patients

### Best practice

The most effective and successful results in preventing low back pain come from an ergonomic approach involving hazard identification, task analysis, and a combination of specific engineering and administrative controls.

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## Trainer's guide (continued)

### Engineering controls

Supervisors shall understand and ask themselves:

- What are the tasks performed by each staff member — can they share tasks and ask for help?
- What are the lifting exposures associated with heavy items such as food and patients?
- What mechanical aids are available to reduce lifting exposures? Where are they located? How are they used?
- Who maintains them? Is “buddy lifting” conducted?
- What mechanical aids are available to reduce exposures? Where are they located? How are they used? Who maintains them?
- Is “buddy lifting” conducted?
- What actions have been taken to promote ergonomic awareness in the workplace?(Talk about it.)
- What is the follow-up or verification process for making sure guidelines are adhered to?

### Workplace controls

Work practice controls are meant to reduce the likelihood of exposure through regular refresher training, reminders, and reinforcing of policies and procedures. Controls include, but are not limited to:

- Pre-shift light stretching is an excellent preventive measure. Taking just a few minutes to stretch alone or while chatting with co-workers on the day's issues can prevent injury.
- Responsibility for implementation and management of an ergonomic plan should be assigned to a specific person.
- This point person should have resources, training, and necessary information to meet their safety responsibilities. Contact your Safehold safety representative.
- Open communication from employees as well as the trainer should be in place. This will allow reporting of symptoms quickly and potentially in time to reverse the effects.
- Staff should be aware of all types of sprains and strains in terms of their signs and symptoms. This will stress the importance of early reporting.
- Record keeping should be a common practice for any veterinary office. Records should include information on both training and prevention as well as any injury report with documentation of signs and symptoms.

### Proper Lifting

#### DO'S

- Stand close to the load.
- Keep a wide stance, and make sure your footing is solid.
- Tighten the stomach muscles
- Assume the Safe Lifting Position
- Pull the load close to the body
- Lift with your legs
- Move slowly, with small steps
- Don't twist the body when carrying
- When unloading, lower the load slowly using your legs, not your back

#### DON'TS

- Bend at the waist while lifting, or lift with your back
- Twist your body while lifting or carrying
- Try to lift more than you can handle
- Reach above your shoulders to lift a load
- Try to recover a falling load
- Pull a load (push instead)

### Questions for discussion

#### Who has responsibility for implementing a strains and sprains action plan policy?

Management, staff, and a designated person in charge of safety, ergonomics, and training.

#### What is the difference between strains and sprains and their causes?

Sprains are ligament injuries resulting from over-stretching. Strains affect muscles and tendons and are caused by trauma or impact.

#### What are some symptoms common to sprains and strains?

Both injury types show bruising, swelling, loss of use of injured area, and pain of varying levels.

#### Where else can I go to obtain additional safety information?

Many websites can be helpful. Examples include:

<https://www.osha.gov>

<http://www.wedmd.com/a-to-z-guides/understanding-sprains-strains-prevention-medref>

[https://www.niams.nih.gov/health\\_info/sprains\\_strains/sprains\\_and\\_strains\\_ff.asp](https://www.niams.nih.gov/health_info/sprains_strains/sprains_and_strains_ff.asp)

<https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=1&ContentID=1889>

# Strains and sprains safety in the veterinary setting

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Please complete the sign-in sheet.

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The Employee Health & Safety exposures and loss prevention efforts are the responsibility of your company. Safeshield services are intended to assist you and your management in evaluating potential exposures to loss and methods to minimize exposure. These services do not necessarily include every possible loss potential, code violation, or exception to good management practice.





# Strains and sprains safety in the veterinary setting

## Employee handout

### Overview

**Strain** — A strain is a stretched or torn muscle or tendon. Tendons are tissues that connect muscle to bone. Twisting or pulling these tissues can cause a strain. Strains can happen suddenly or develop over time. Symptoms of a strain include pain, limited motion, muscle spasms, and possibly muscle weakness. They can also have localized swelling, cramping, or inflammation and, with a minor or moderate strain, usually some loss of muscle function.

**Sprain** — A sprain is a stretched or torn ligament (tissues that connect bones at a joint). Symptoms include pain, swelling, bruising, and being unable to move your joint. You might feel a pop or tear when the injury happens. A sprain is usually caused by direct or indirect trauma (a fall, a blow to the body, etc.) that knocks a joint out of position, over-stretches, and, in severe cases, ruptures the supporting ligaments.

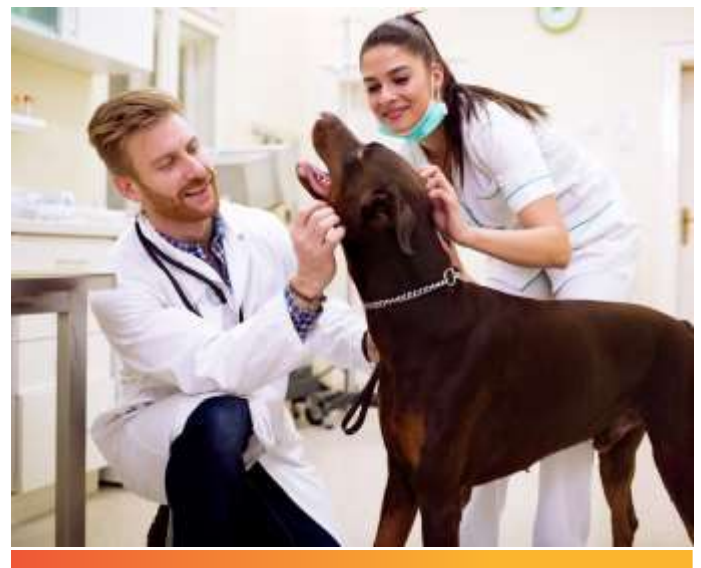
### Control measures

Pre-shift light stretching is an excellent preventive measure. Taking just a few minutes to stretch alone or while chatting with coworkers on the day's issues can prevent injury.

Work practice controls are meant to reduce the likelihood of exposure through regular refresher training, reminding, and reinforcing of policies and procedures. Controls include, but are not limited to:

- Wearing the right shoes. Much like preventing sports injuries of the knee, wearing the proper, work-specific shoes can make all the difference. Shoes with a wider surface are less likely to tip sideways than running shoes, which are designed for forward movement, not side-to-side.
- Strengthening ankle muscles. Overstretched ligaments and tendons make the ankle weak and unstable, often resulting in subsequent injuries. You can't strengthen ligaments or tendons, but you can try to strengthen the muscles around the ankles to compensate.

- Knowing your limits. Sometimes an injury is overlooked or a task is underestimated. Know what your limits are; listen to your body; ask for assistance when lifting; practice good housekeeping to avoid slip, trip, and fall hazards; use lifting aids; practice good posture.
- Responsibility for implementation and management of an ergonomic plan should be assigned to a specific person.
- This point person should have resources, training, and necessary information to meet their safety responsibilities.
- Open communication from employees as well as the trainer should be in place. This will allow reporting of symptoms quickly and potentially in time to reverse the effects.
- Staff should be trained about all types of sprains and strains in terms of their signs and symptoms. This will stress the importance of early reporting.
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