

## Preventative Maintenance...For Your Back

Back pain can be a debilitating experience, especially for professional drivers – an industry that has already been shown to produce a higher incidence of such problems. Just like caring for our vehicles, the best plan of action is a proactive one: *preventative maintenance*. Most back problems are caused by stress and a decline in physical fitness, to include posture and flexibility. Keeping physically fit is just as important as knowing proper lifting techniques when it comes to preventing back injuries.

### Limber Up

#### *On the Road:*

- As a driver, much of your time is spent in the same position, which can be just as taxing to your muscles as too much movement. Sitting in the same position for too long will cause your muscles to tense and stiffen. Counteract this by taking breaks as frequently as possible to stretch or take a brisk walk. This will improve circulation and keep your muscles loose.

#### *Off the Job:*

- Taking exercise breaks on the road may help relieve some of the day's built-up muscle tension, but even more important is a regular exercise routine off the road. Just 30 minutes a day of a workout that elevates your heart rate will burn calories, helping to trim excess weight (or keep it off).
- Maintaining or improving your flexibility is also vital in protecting your back. Muscles tighten and shorten if they are not used or stretched often. Many injuries are a result of overextending a muscle past the point it is used to. Start your morning with a brief stretching routine, focusing on major muscles and those that may be used during the day's work.

### Eat Right

- Proper nutrition is important for many reasons, especially as we get older, but how will it help your back? Maintaining a healthy weight will help keep the back balanced on the spine and in an optimal position for more strenuous tasks. Watch what you eat, and be sure you are getting all of the vitamins and nutrients your body needs.