

Smart Ergonomics at the Thrift Shop

A practical guide for volunteers at checkout, bagging, books, sorting and receiving

Good ergonomics means arranging the task so your body can work in a comfortable, neutral position. The biggest habits are simple: **keep work close, reduce twisting, vary your position, and use carts or help for awkward loads.**

1 Checkout / Cashiering



Sit close enough to reach the register, cash drawer, scanner and bags without leaning. Keep both feet supported. To turn, pivot the chair or move your feet instead of repeatedly twisting your back.

BEST PRACTICE

Keep high-use items directly in front of you and alternate sitting and standing when the setup allows.

2 Bagging / Counter Work



Bring bags and merchandise toward you instead of reaching across the counter. Keep elbows near your sides and wrists as straight as practical. Slide items when possible rather than repeatedly lifting them.

BEST PRACTICE

Change hand position and stance during busy periods; avoid staying leaned forward or to one side.

3 Books / Sorting / Shelving



Raise boxes or bins onto a stable surface when possible. Sort small batches close to your body. Turn your whole body toward the next shelf instead of twisting while holding books.

BEST PRACTICE

Place frequent or heavier items where they can be handled without deep bending, overhead reaching or long reaches.

4 Receiving / Lifting / Carrying



Before lifting, clear the path and check whether the item is bulky, unstable or awkward. Keep the load close, face the direction you are moving and step to turn. Use two hands when practical.

BEST PRACTICE

Use a cart or ask for help whenever a load feels heavy, bulky, unstable, or makes you strain or change your posture.



Keep the Work Close - and Let the Equipment Help

Small setup changes can reduce repeated reaching, bending and force throughout a volunteer shift.

5 Carts & Moving Loads



Use a cart for awkward or multiple items. Keep the cart close, make sure you can see the path, and use both hands for control when practical.

BEST PRACTICE

On level surfaces, pushing a suitable cart is often preferable to pulling because you face the direction of travel.

6 Reaching & Step Stools



Move close to the shelf before reaching. Avoid handling a load at arm's length. Use a stable step stool for higher shelves instead of stretching overhead.

BEST PRACTICE

If an item is outside a comfortable reach or lift height, reposition it or get assistance.

A 60-Second Body Reset

Use this after a rush, when changing tasks, or whenever you notice stiffness.

10 SEC

RESET

Let your shoulders drop. Unclench your hands and jaw.

20 SEC

MOVE

Stand up or change stance. Take a few easy steps if space allows.

20 SEC

REACH NEUTRAL

Bring the next task closer. Square your body toward the work.

10 SEC

CHECK

Pain, numbness, tingling or unusual weakness? Stop and tell the volunteer lead.

No single "safe lifting weight" fits every volunteer or every task.

Risk changes with weight, size, reach distance, lift height, twisting, grip, repetition and duration. When in doubt, use a cart, divide the load, or ask for help.

Sources: NIOSH Retail Ergonomics • WA L&I Ergonomics Process • Camano Centers Ergonomics

