



Back Safety Tips **For Healthcare Professionals**

As a nurse, physical therapist, or occupational therapist, you devote much of your time to lifting and moving patients. Since patients are precious cargo, you have to provide not only for your safety, but for theirs as well. This responsibility makes it especially important to plan each maneuver with your back in mind. If something goes wrong, in your efforts to protect the patient you could injure your back. Try the following tips on how to use good leverage and maintain your three natural curves while performing a variety of tasks. The reward can be both an injury-free back and better patient safety.

Bed to Stretcher Transfer

Transferring a patient from bed to stretcher is a difficult maneuver when the patient is too sick to help. In situations like this you should:

- Get assistance if you can.
- Put a plastic bag beneath draw-sheet to facilitate sliding the patient.
- Adjust bed to level of stretcher.
- Lock bed and lock stretcher | place next to the bed.
- Start with knee on stretcher; if necessary, get on the bed to move the patient to the end.
- Transfer patient in two stages, first to the edge and then to the middle of the stretcher.
- Maintain your three natural curves.

Bed to Wheelchair Transfer

When transferring a patient from bed to a wheelchair, the patient usually can help by pushing with arms and extending legs. To safely take advantage of this:

- Lock wheelchair and adjust bed height.
- Remove wheelchair armrest nearest bed.
- Support patient's weak knee (or knees of both are weak) between your legs.
- On signal, move patient to standing position, from edge of bed with rocking motion, keep your knees slightly bent, back balanced.
- Pivot and lower the patient into the wheelchair by bending your knees.
- If patient must hold on to you, have him or her hold your waist or shoulders, not neck.

Pulling Patient up in Bed

Pulling a patient up in bed sometimes seems so easy, you almost forget to use good body mechanics. To avoid hurting your back;

- Adjust the bed height to below your waist.
- Work from side of the bed, feet pointed in direction you'll move the patient.
- Reach under patient's shoulders and back, and slide, don't lift.
- Ask patient to help by pushing against the mattress with feet and. Or elbows.
- Keep you feet wide apart, knees bent, and the three natural curves aligned.

Turning Patient Over

You can turn a patient over with out any lifting by planning the maneuver and using a draw-sheet. To do this safely:

- Adjust the bed height to mid or upper thigh.
- Slide the patient in the opposite direction he or she will be rolling.

- Put bed rails down, only if it's safe for the patient.
- Cross patient arms on chest; cross patient's legs.
- Put your knee on bed, near the patient's shoulder.
- Use your whole body, keeping your knees bent and your back balanced.
- If possible, turn patient toward you.

Wheelchair to Toilet Transfer

A wheelchair to toilet transfer presents special problems because there is little room to maneuver in most bathrooms and the possibility of the patient falling is increased. To help a patient:

- If patient has a cast, position patient with strong leg closest to toilet.
- Lock wheelchair.
- Have patient use grab bar and wheelchair arm for support.
- Bend knees and maintain your back's three natural curves.
- If more support is needed, get help.

Falling Patient

Patients fall for many reasons. They may be afraid, become dizzy, or their knees may buckle. When a patient begins falling:

- Don't try to prevent the fall; guide the patient easily and safely to the floor, bending your knees, not your back.
- Stay close to the patient
- Mentally practice this maneuver before an accident actually happens.
- Get help to lift the patient from the floor.

Posture while Standing

When you perform a task that requires prolonged standing, you may slouch and forget to maintain your three natural curves. This bad posture can cause muscle tension, stiffness, fatigue, backache, and neckache. It also contributes to degeneration of disks and ligaments. To maintain good posture:

- Stand close to the patient so you don't have to lean forward.
- Bend with your knees and maintain your back's three natural curves.

Mechanical Aids and Assistance

- Take advantage of aids like mechanical lifts to safely move patient from beds, chairs, toilets, and cars.
- Use a transfer belt to help you move a patient safely and securely when doing a wheelchair transfer. Place hands on patient's waist of transfer belt to prevent twisting and provide support.
- Teach patients to use the trapeze to help move themselves in bed and give assistance during transfers.
- Use a roller (sliding board) to help you move a patient between a bed and a stretcher safely and efficiently.

You are the backbone ... of a healthy facility. When you take care of your back, you work more comfortably and efficiently, and lose less time from the job. You provide better care for patients and better support for coworkers. Everybody benefits. Do yourself favor and others in your facility a favor – take care of your back it's the only one you get.