

LIFTING AND MOVING CLIENTS SAFELY

Lifting and moving clients is a major cause of injury in the health-care field. Improper lifting and moving affects both clients and staff and increases the risk for:

- Cuts and bruises
- Strains and sprains; especially to the upper and lower back, neck, wrists, hands and knees
- Broken limbs
- Lasting disabilities such as chronic back pain.

Most moving and lifting injuries result from:

- Transferring a client from the bed to wheelchair, shower chair, or bedside commode; from the wheelchair to the commode, toilet, shower chair, etc.
- Repositioning a client in bed
- Transferring a client with a mechanical lift that needs repair or is used incorrectly
- Twisting (at the waist rather than turning with your feet) and other sudden movements
- Working in confined spaces, such as a bathroom, or a small crowded bedroom
- Working at too fast of a pace
- Slips, trips and falls
- A client who moves suddenly or is uncooperative

The cost of lifting and moving injuries is high for all involved. For employees they include:

- Lost time at work and a loss of wages
- Higher medical expenses

For employers they include:

- Added legal costs and client complaints
- Higher workers' compensation costs
- Higher insurance rates

The cost for a client might include:

- Bodily injury
- Lost time/hours of needed, personal care services

Injuries caused by lifting and moving can be prevented. Whether you are working in a facility with other staff or one on one with a client in their home, always think **“safety first”** *before* you begin lifting and moving and:

1. Assess the situation first.

- What are your client's abilities and limitations? What is their medical condition? Is there any oxygen tubing, catheter tubing, or bandages to consider? Are they strong and flexible enough to help? How much do they weigh? Are they able to bear any of their weight? Do they use a transfer belt or a mechanical lift? What are their mental capabilities? Are these affected by medications? Are they able to direct the move and/or follow directions?
- What are your abilities and limitations? Going beyond them increases the risk for injury. Have you been properly trained? This includes lifting and moving techniques—and the use of equipment. Are you wearing proper footwear? Shoes should have non-slip soles and fit well. Are you wearing any personal protective equipment that could affect the move? (glove, masks, etc., can affect your grip and vision).

- Is the environment safe? Are there any loose throw rugs or carpeting? Is the flooring slippery? Any wet surfaces? Are there any electrical cords, furniture, boxes or other obstacles? Even for a short move, a clear path is essential for a safety. If hazards cannot be removed or avoided, plan a new move.
2. **Prepare for the move and take steps to avoid or reduce manual handling.**
 - Get help if you need it. Other staff or family available to assist? Assistance is required if a client is considered: heavy (over 150#); unable to help due to their medical or physical condition; uncooperative or aggressive. A team lift with two people should be used. Do not attempt to lift alone-both will be at risk for injury.
 - Get the equipment. If your work site does not have other staff or family available to assist, there should be assistive equipment (mechanical lift, sliding board, transfer belt, turn sheets, etc.) in the home and in working order (free of defects and appropriate for the client's size and condition). Remember, only use equipment you have been trained to use. If you have any doubts about the move or using assistive equipment, ask for help.
 3. **Prepare your client for the move. It is safer if client and caregiver work as a team.**
 - Explain what will happen and why. Keep in mind each move is different than the one prior. Explaining what and why each time you are preparing for a move.
 - Give clear instructions to clients who can help with the move. Go step by step. At times, it is best to show them exactly what they need to do.
 - Ask if they have any questions or concerns. If able, have them repeat them to you, to be sure understanding is reached.
 - In some cases, the client may be the one giving the instructions regarding a lift or move. As you have already "assessed" their abilities and limitations, it will be a stronger team relationship if you listen and follow them.
 4. **Position and adjust equipment properly.**
 - Adjust the bed. Raise or lower the bed to your center of gravity. In general, this is a few inches from your waist. Position the head of the bed. Depending on the type of move, you may need to raise it to an upright position (assists the client closer to a sitting position) or lower it flat (less work when applying and removing a lift sheet for a mechanical lift). Put side rails up or down as needed. Lock the wheels.
 - Place the wheelchair, shower chair, commode, etc., as close to the client as possible. Align it properly. For example, the wheelchair should be placed parallel (or at a 45-degree angle) to the bed. Adjust side or handrails as need. If the remove the arm-rest closest to the client if able. Move wheelchair footrests out of the way. Lock the brakes.
 - Make further adjustments as needed. Keep the bed the same height as the wheelchair if possible. Make sure the client and any other helpers are in the correct position.

In summary, lifting and moving injuries can be prevented. Always keep in mind "Safety First" before you begin a move.

- Learn as much about your client's abilities as you can
- Know your own limits
- Make sure you have a clear pathway
- Help of another or assistive equipment you have been trained to use
- Understanding and preparation between you and your client
- Properly position your client and all equipment involve to avoid or reduce manual handling

Using these guidelines BEFORE lifting or moving, decreases everyone's risk of injury during the move.