Back Safety & Body Mechanics

For more information should you have any questions about Back Safety and Body Mechanics please contact:

Rehabilitation Services at 304-424-2313

OR

The Employee Health Nurse at 304-424-2219
When lifting and moving patients is part of your job, it's especially important to practice good body mechanics. Using good body mechanics means moving in an efficient, balanced way that protects your back from unnecessary stress, even when maneuvering heavy or awkward loads. Working in this way may take a little extra time and concentration, but it will pay off in the long run by reducing your risk of back pain and injury.

It's More Than Just Lifting With Your Legs
"Lift with your legs, not with your back." No doubt you've heard this rule before. It's a good rule, but if your job involves moving patients, it's not enough. When you move a patient, you're typically not only lifting; you're also bending, pushing, pulling, reaching, and supporting. Also, because your load is a person—not a box—you have to watch out for someone else's comfort and safety as well as your own.

In addition to using the strength in your legs, when moving patients follow these three basic principles of good body mechanics:

- Find your back's neutral position, and hold it.
- Keep weight close to you.
- Shift, don't twist.

Find And Hold Neutral Position
Your back's neutral position is the position your back—especially your lower back—is most comfortable in and the position that will give you the most stability and protection against injury. Your lower back is especially vulnerable to injury because it carries so much of the weight of your upper body.

There is no one neutral position for everyone. To find your neutral position, stand with your legs shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, and your weight distributed evenly. Using your stomach muscles, tilt your pelvis forward in a slight tuck, and then backward in a slight swayback. Do this slowly, several times, until you find the position that feels most comfortable for you. Practice tightening your stomach muscles to stabilize your back in this position. Whatever your neutral position, the important thing is that you stabilize your lower back in this position whenever you move patients.

Keep Weight Close To You
The farther away from your body that you hold a load, the more strength it takes and the more stress there is on your back. Lifting even a light weight can hurt your back if you hold the load too far from your body. Whether you're lifting a patient's legs to reposition her in the bed, or supporting a patient's whole body as you lower him into a wheelchair, the closer your body is to the weight you're lifting, the better.

Shift, Don't Twist
Twisting your torso while lifting, or while holding a heavy load, is one of the most stressful things you can do to your spine. Always lift first without twisting. Then, if you have to move yourself or your load, get your feet and legs into the action. Move your torso as one solid unit, bend your knees, point your leading foot in the direction you want to go, shift your weight, and step toward your destination.

Other Tips To Remember
In addition to these techniques, remember the following tips:

- Before lifting make sure that your footing is solid and your path is clear of obstacles. Use a wide stance, with bent knees.
- Communicate your plan to your patient and any helpers, so that everyone knows what to expect. Maintain eye contact and communication with your patient, and be alert for trouble signs.
- Make your own safety a priority. If a patient is too heavy or too awkward to move, always ask for help.

Stay Injury Free
Back pain is too common a complaint among health care workers who lift and move patients. But back problems don't have to be part of your job. Learning and practicing good body mechanics can mean the difference between a healthy back and an annoying—or even debilitating—back injury.
Moving Patients

In Bed

Moving patients in bed may seem like a routine, fairly simple part of your job. But precisely because you do it so often, you might overlook the risks involved. If you try to move patients by yourself or too quickly, or if you don’t use good body mechanics, you increase your chances of back pain or injury. Protect yourself by always adjusting the top of the bed to the waist level of the shortest person helping, and getting as close to patients as you can to reduce stress on your back. Explain procedure before moving patient.

MAKING THE BED

The easiest way to make a patient’s bed is from side to side, rolling the patient to one side of the bed to remove and replace the bottom sheets. When you have to make the bed from top to bottom, follow these steps:

- Determine how much assistance you need. Depending on how much the patient can help, you may need two to four people.

- Put the head of the bed down, untuck the dirty bottom sheets, and unfold the clean sheets at the top of the bed. Have the patient lift his or her head for a moment, as you roll both dirty and clean sheets down toward the patient’s shoulders. Then tuck in as much of the clean sheets as possible.

- With your knee on the bed, help the patient lift his or her upper body off the bed by supporting his or her shoulders. Roll both dirty and clean sheets down under the patient’s waist, then put the patient back down.

- With your knee on the bed and your elbow on your knee, help the patient lift his or her buttocks off the bed. Pull dirty and clean sheets underneath the patient’s buttocks and down toward the foot of the bed. Once the patient is comfortably settled back down, finish making the bed.

Turning A Patient

One or two people can usually turn a patient safely. With your knee on the bed, cross the patient’s arms on his or her chest, and bend the patient’s leg that’s farthest from you. Put one hand behind the patient’s far shoulder and the other hand behind the patient’s far hip. Use your knee to support the patient as you turn him or her over.

Pulling A Patient Up

Get help when you have to pull a patient up in bed by yourself—it’s much easier with two people, and even easier when the patient helps out by bending at the knees and pushing his or her feet against the bed. A draw sheet can reduce friction and help the patient slide more easily. Grasp the draw sheet at the level of the patient’s shoulders and hips. Point one foot in the direction you’re moving the patient, bend your knees, and lean your weight in the direction of the move. At an agreed-upon signal, (such as “one, two, lift”) lift slightly and pull the patient up.
Moving Patients
From A Bed To A Gurney

Moving a patient from a bed to a gurney can be stressful on your back, because, typically, the patient is immobile. You can make things easier on yourself if you get a helper, reduce extra friction by using a slide board (or large plastic bag) and draw sheet, and get gravity on your side by positioning the gurney slightly lower than the bed. Explain procedure before moving the patient.

Get Ready
Put the head of the bed down and adjust the bed height to your waist level. Put a draw sheet into position, and place your slide board or plastic bag under the patient between the draw sheet and sheet. Move the patient’s legs toward the edge of the bed so you don’t have to move them as far later. Then use the draw sheet to slide the patient’s torso to the edge of the bed, using your body weight—not your back—to help do the pulling. Your helper should hold the sheet to keep it from slipping.

Position The Gurney
Position the gurney at the side of the bed and adjust the height slightly lower than the bed. While you’re handling the gurney, your helper should hold both sides of the draw sheet to make sure the patient stays safely on the bed. Once the gurney is in place, move the patient’s legs onto it.

Move Onto The Gurney
While your helper kneels on the bed and holds the draw sheet, bend your knees, lean back, and slide the patient onto the gurney. Tighten your stomach muscles as you pull—this can help keep your low back in its stable, neutral position and protect against strain.
Moving Patients
From A Bed To A Wheelchair

Moving a patient from a bed to a wheelchair will usually go more smoothly if you explain the steps of the transfer to your patient, and find ways to have him or her help whenever possible. If a patient can't help very much, you'll need to get a helper. A transfer belt can also make this move easier, because it gives you a better handhold.

Help The Patient Sit Up
Position the wheelchair parallel to the bed, and lock it into place. If the patient needs help sitting up, first help him or her turn onto his or her side. Put your arm under the patient's neck to support the shoulders. With your other hand under the patient's knees, swing the legs over the edge of the bed and at the same time, lift the shoulders to bring the patient into a sitting position. Then have the patient scoot to the edge of the bed.

Rise To Standing
Put your arms around the patient's chest. Grasp the transfer belt, or interlace your hands behind his or her back. Put the patient's leg that is farther from the wheelchair between your legs. Then lean back and lift, being careful to protect your own back from strain. If the patient is very weak, brace your knees against the patient's knees to prevent a fall.

Pivot And Sit Down
Keeping your arms around the patient and your legs supporting his or her leg, help the patient pivot so that his or her buttocks face the chair. Then, as the patient bends toward you, bend your knees and lower him or her into the chair. A helper can support the wheelchair and guide the patient into a comfortable position in the chair.
Preventing Patient Falls

Studies show that falls are the single biggest cause of injury to patients staying at healthcare facilities. Most patients fall in their rooms, either within feet of the bed or on the way to the bathroom. In addition to practicing safe moving and transfer techniques, you can do a lot to prevent patient falls by paying special attention to safety in patient rooms.

Keep On Top Of Spills
Basic housekeeping is the best way to prevent patient falls. Patients often slip or trip on water, urine, or food that is on the floor. Keep an eye on patients whom you know are suffering from incontinence or who often spill or drop things, and clean up spills as soon as you see them.

Prevent Reaching
Keep patient belongings and call buttons close to the bed so that patients don’t have to reach too far for them. Make sure call buttons are also within reach in the bathroom—close to the toilet and shower.

Nighttime Safety
Lift up safety rails on bed before patient goes to sleep. Encourage patients to use the bathroom before they go to bed. This can reduce nighttime falls. Make sure that patients who might need to get up at night have adequate lighting and walking aids, if needed. Remind patients to put slippers with non-slip soles by the bed before they go to sleep.

GET AS CLOSE TO THE PATIENT AS POSSIBLE. SUPPORT THE PATIENT WITH YOUR BODY BY GETTING YOUR HIPS UNDER HIS OR HERS AND HOLDING THE PATIENT IN A FIRM HUG.

If A Patient Falls
When a patient starts to fall, your first response may be to try to catch him or her. But catching a falling patient is almost impossible, and can injure both of you. Instead, go down with the fall to slow the patient down and cushion the impact.

- Get as close to the patient as possible. Support the patient with your body by getting your hips under his or hers and holding the patient in a firm hug.
- Think about protecting the patient’s head during the fall.
- If you’re near a wall, gently push the patient against it to slow the fall.

After a fall, don’t try to lift the patient off the floor by yourself. The patient may feel dizzy or faint, or be injured. Instead, call for help and tend to any injuries before moving the patient. When it’s time to move the patient back to a gurney or bed, get help—you’ll probably need at least four people to move a fallen patient up off the floor.

Know Your Patients
Patients who are over 65, agitated, weakened, or taking a combination of medications are more likely to fall. It may help to make a mental note of patients with these or other temporary or permanent conditions, so that you can make a special effort to help prevent them from falling.
Moving Patients
Using Assistive Devices

Moving some patients, especially those who are immobilized, often requires that you use assistive devices. These devices can make your job easier, but to work with them safely you need to protect your back by using good body mechanics. Explain procedure before moving the patient.

Draw Sheets
Draw sheets can help you more easily move patients in bed. It's best not to use them by yourself. Roll the draw sheet tightly under the patient on one side, or if moving the patient toward the foot or head of the bed, on both sides. Grasp the rolled sheet, palms up, near the patient’s hips and shoulders. Keeping your knees bent and your back in neutral position, lift slightly and drag the sheet in the direction you want to move the patient. Ask the patient to help, if possible, by pulling on the bed rail or headboard, or by pushing with his or her feet.

Slide Boards
Slide boards—also called transfer boards—reduce friction so patients can slide more easily. (Large plastic bags will work the same way.) Be sure to scoot enough of the board beneath the patient before you start the transfer. Bend your knees, keep your back in neutral position, avoid overextending yourself and get help when you need it.

Transfer Belts
Transfer belts fit around a patient’s waist to provide you with a firm handhold. They can be very helpful during wheelchair transfers. Remember to bend your knees as much as is comfortable, rather than making your back do all the work.

Trapezes
A trapeze lets a patient help you move him or her in bed. Coordinating movement with a patient is easiest when you review the move first, take it slow and easy, and rest when either of you needs to.

Mechanical Lifts
You may need to use a mechanical lift to move patients who are paralyzed or extremely heavy. Practice with the lift before using it with a patient, so that there won't be any surprises for either of you.
CCMC Transfer Equipment

Full size slider  Half-Shifter  Roller  Hoyer Lift

Sara Stedy  Sara Plus