

Guide to safe lifting techniques for caregivers



Being a caregiver can be physically difficult. It can also be dangerous for your back, neck, or shoulders. If you do not use safe lifting techniques, both you and the person you care for could be injured.

You have a greater risk of injury when you:

- Help a person sit up from lying down.
- Help a person get out of bed.
- Move a person from a bed to a chair or wheelchair.
- Lean over someone for long periods of time.

What are the risks?

Without using safe lifting techniques, caregivers are at higher risk of injuring their back, neck, and shoulders. These injuries can be sudden and traumatic, or they can happen over time from repeating the same stressful motion over and over (overuse injuries). Overuse injuries are more common. These happen because muscles and joints do not have time to recover between repeated stressful movements. Using safe lifting techniques can help prevent injuries.

Before lifting:

- Stretch and warm up your muscles before lifting or moving. Cold and stiff muscles get injured more easily.
- Talk to the person about what you are going to do. This may help him or her assist you with the lifting.
- Have the person move toward the edge of the bed to his or her strong side, if possible.
- Agree on timing with the person. For example, count to three.

While lifting:

- Always keep your head, shoulders, and back aligned. Twisting is a major cause of injury.
- If you need to move while lifting, shift your feet in small steps while keeping your back straight.
- Do not let a person you are lifting lock arms around your neck. This can make you lose your balance or fall forward, and can place strain on your neck.
- Always keep your back as straight as possible. Bending at the waist or leaning over is a major cause of back injury.
- When you are lifting a person or a heavy object, do not lift with your arms extended. Keep the person or object close to your body.

- Keep your feet spread shoulder-width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other. This helps you maintain balance within your center of gravity when lifting.
- Use the big muscles in your legs and arms instead of your back muscles to lift or pull. Tighten your belly muscles to help support and stabilize your back.
- If you have trouble lifting a person, or the person fights you or is stuck in a difficult position, do not try to lift alone. Get help.
- If you feel pain while lifting, stop and get help.

How to help someone sit up, stand up, or sit down:

Helping someone sit up, stand up, or sit down involves both lifting and turning. These movements require special techniques. Do not bend, twist, or lift with your back muscles.

To help someone sit up to get out of bed:

- Place the chair or wheelchair close to the bed. Make sure the wheelchair wheels are locked.
- Have the person roll toward the edge of the bed with his or her side facing toward you.
- Have the person use arms or elbows as he or she is able to sit up.
- Place one arm under the person's shoulders and the other arm under the person's knees.
- Keep your feet spread shoulder-width apart and bend at your knees, not your back.
- Keep your back straight, and turn the person so that their legs come out over the bed and their upper body comes up straight into a sitting position.
- Have the person sit for a moment to check for dizziness or lightheadedness once sitting up.
- Check the bed height and make sure the person's feet can touch the floor when sitting upright.

To help someone stand up from a bed, chair, or wheelchair:

- Make sure the wheelchair wheels are locked.
- Have the person move forward toward the edge of the bed or chair.
- Position the person's feet flat on the floor spread shoulder-width apart. The feet should be directly under the knees or slightly behind.
- Place the person's hands on the bed or arms of the chair, not around your neck.
- Place your arms around the person's upper back and clasp your hands together.
- Hold the person close to you, and lean your weight back. The person should lean forward at the waist. Use your legs while keeping your back straight. Avoid pulling with your back.
- Use a lifting belt around the person's waist to make lifting safer and easier.

To help someone sit down:

- When someone is standing with you, support the person close to your body.
- Turn to the chair or wheelchair with small shuffling steps.
- Keep your back straight.
- Have the person put both hands on the arms of the chair, wheelchair, or surface they are going to sit on.
- Lower the person into the chair by bending your knees, not by leaning forward.

Contact a health care provider if:

- You have pain during or after moving or lifting.
- You have pain while resting.
- You have tingling, numbness, or shooting pain anywhere in your body.
- You have bruising, swelling, or stiffness.
- You have weakness that makes lifting hard.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.
Used in partnership with and Copyright © 2024 Elsevier, its licensors, and contributors.