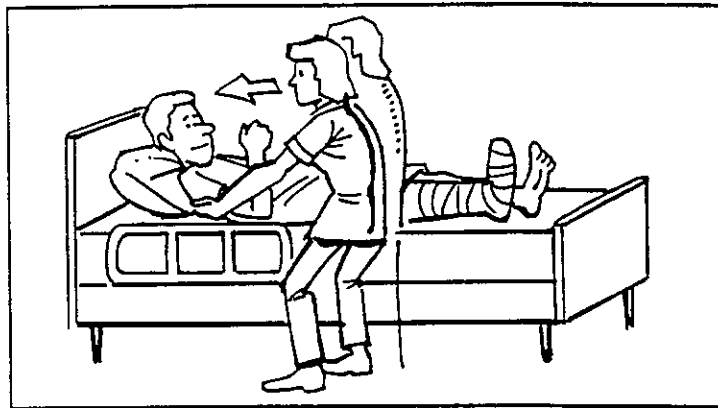


BODY MECHANICS FOR PATIENT CARE STAFF

► 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. ❏