

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Back Strain – Proper Lifting

Back injuries are among the most common injuries in the workplace. But sometimes as a caregiver, you will have to help the person in your care move to a chair or be asked to pick up a heavy object. Though this seems like a simple maneuver, it is very easy to be injured doing this and left unable to perform your caregiving duties. A little attention to the safest way to move your body—and the person in your care—will keep you from unnecessary injury. Most muscle strain injuries to both the caregiver and care receiver are preventable if you follow some simple rules.

- ➔ Bend your knees slightly.
- ➔ Keep your spine in a neutral (normal arched curve, not stiff) position while lifting.
- ➔ **USE YOUR LEGS** instead of your back to do most of the work—leg muscles are stronger than back muscles.
- ➔ If you can adjust the bed, keep the top at about waist level. If it is low or you are tall, put one foot on a footstool to relieve pressure on your lower back.



## Body Mechanics

The proper use of our bodies is called *body mechanics*. It involves standing and moving in ways that prevent injury, avoid fatigue, and make the best use of strength. When you learn how to move, control and balance your own body, it's easier to control and help or move another person.

## General Rules

The following hints will help you use proper body mechanics and be safe.

- ➔ Only lift as much as you can comfortably handle.
- ➔ Always let the person you are helping know what you are going to do.
- ➔ To create a base of support, stand with your feet 8"–12" apart with one foot a half step ahead of the other.

## Preventing Back & Neck Pain

If you are overweight, lose weight. Excess weight puts extra stress on back and stomach muscles and on joints. One pound of extra weight puts four extra pounds of stress on knee joints. To prevent injuries to yourself, get plenty of rest and maintain:

- Good nutrition.
- Physical fitness.
- Good body mechanics.
- A stress management program such as daily meditation.
- A stretching routine before you lift. It gets blood flowing to the muscles as well as to the discs between the vertebrae in the spine.
- A back strengthening exercise program.
- Do not smoke. Both smoke and nicotine cause your spine to age faster than normal.

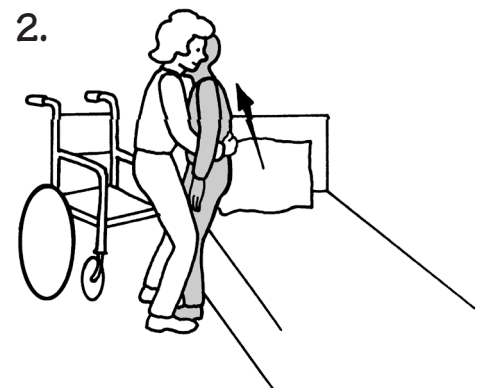
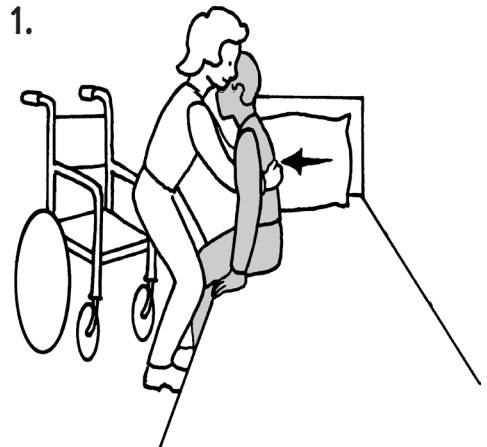


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## Helpful Caregiver Advice for Moving a Person

Be sure to get training from a physical therapist for the steps for a specific move or a transfer.

1.  Plan the lift—check the area for slippery spots or possible tripping hazards. Wearing non-skid heels and soles will be safer for both you and the person you are assisting.
  - Tell the person what you are going to do.
  - Before starting the move, count with the person, “1-2-3.”
  
2.  To feel in control, get close to the person you are moving or lifting.
  - Keep your back in a neutral position, knees bent, weight distributed between both feet. Tighten your stomach and back muscles to maintain a correct support position.
  - Use your arms to support the person.
  - Again, let your legs do the lifting.
  
3.  Turn, rather than twist, your body.
  - Breathe deeply.
  - Keep your shoulders relaxed.
  - When needing to give a lot of assistance with transfers, tie a strong belt or a transfer belt around the person’s waist and hold it as you complete the transfer. In some situations, you may need a lift device, such as a Hoyer lift, to help you.



### NOTE

**Avoid twisting at the waist** when moving the person from bed to wheelchair. Instead of twisting, turn your whole body, starting with your feet.

## Taking Care of Yourself—Daily Back Strengthening Exercises

**Hug Your Knees**—Lie on your back with knees bent and soles on the floor. Use your arms to hug one knee at a time to your chest. Ten times each knee.

**Flatten Your Back**—Lie on your back with knees bent and soles on the floor. Take deep breaths as you tighten your abdominal muscles and press the small of your back into the floor. Hold to a count of 15 as you continue to breathe deeply.

**Chest Lift**—Lie on your stomach in a relaxed position.

Put your hands palms down at chest level and raise your head and chest from the floor. Breathe and hold this position for a count of 25. Gradually increase the time you are able to remain in this position.

If these exercises cause your back pain to increase, stop and seek

medical help. Only work within your physical limits. Doing too much, too fast can increase back pain and slow down the healing process. Remember to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Don't expect miracles. These back strengthening exercises will take time to have an effect. Continue them, even after your back feels stronger. And, no matter how strong your back feels, always use proper body mechanics!



## Live Life Laughing!

I'm having terrible luck!  
Bob, sing something catchy.



## Inspiration

*Tell me who your friends are and I  
will tell you who you are.*

~ Russian proverb.

## Memory Care

Because it is difficult for a person with Alzheimer's to adjust to changes in the environment, it may be best to make some changes when the person is in the early stage of the illness and will have the easiest time getting used to them.

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## SAFETY TIPS— If the Person in Your Care Falls

When you suspect a broken bone, follow these steps:

- If the person cannot move or use the injured limb, keep it from moving. **Do not** straighten a deformed arm or leg.
- Support the injured part above and below the site of the injury by using folded towels, blankets, pillows, or magazines.
- If the person is face down, and breathing is adequate, leave the person in the same position.
- Keep the person warm with a blanket and make him as comfortable as possible.
- Call 911.

### NOTE

If *you* fall, you may not be able to rely on a person with Alzheimer's to help you or to call for help. You may want to consider enrolling *yourself* in a First Alert type service, that you can activate in such an emergency.

NEXT ISSUE... IN THE HOSPITAL WITH ALZHEIMER'S

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U . . . C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

The back—especially the lower back—bears much of the body’s weight during walking, lifting and other activities. It makes sense, then, that injuries to the lower back—such as strains and sprains—are common. But by using correct body mechanics during the caregiving day, you will prevent needless injuries. Check your knowledge of body mechanics by answering True or False to the questions below.

1. When lifting, use your arms and back rather than your legs.  
T F
2. *Body mechanics* is using your body properly to perform tasks.  
T F
3. Never tell someone when you are going to move him, to help him avoid being tense.  
T F
4. You have no control over building strength in your muscles.  
T F
5. A little attention to the safest way to move your body—and the person in your care—will keep you from unnecessary injury.  
T F
6. When transferring someone from bed to chair, twist at the waist to set him down safely.  
T F
7. Do a stretching routine before you lift. It gets blood flowing to the muscles as well as to the discs between the vertebrae in the spine.  
T F
8. If the person in your care falls and you suspect a broken bone, keep him warm with a blanket, make him as comfortable as possible and call 911.  
T F
9. A transfer belt can help you set a person into a chair more easily.  
T F
10. Feet together is the best base for lifting someone.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_