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How to Help Someone Who Uses a Wheelchair

Wheelchair Transfers

Moving someone from one surface area to another is called a transfer. One example of a transfer is moving someone from the bed to a wheelchair. The method used to transfer someone will vary depending on the weight and height of the person being transferred and the person helping to transfer. The amount of assistance varies, too. One person may need only minimal assistance to get in and out of a wheelchair, while another person may need maximum assistance. No one method is right for everyone. If you need to help someone to transfer in and out of a wheelchair, always get instruction from a physical therapist. Ask your doctor for a referral.

- Flat shoes with a non-skid sole should be worn by you and by the person being transferred.
- Good lighting is important. Never try to move someone in the dark.
- Some pets can get underfoot. Place pets in another room before attempting a transfer.
- Allow the person to help as much as possible.
- Before attempting a transfer, always tell the person what you are planning to do.

Setting up the Wheelchair

- At least half the work of every wheelchair transfer is in the set up: the correct positioning of the wheelchair and the correct positioning of the person you are helping to move.
- Always begin with the wheelchair on the person's strong side, if there is one.
- The wheelchair should be set at a 45-degree angle to the bed or whatever surface you are transferring from.
- Lock both sides of the wheelchair.
- Swing both foot plates up and away to the raised position or remove them.

How to Transfer Someone from a Bed to a Wheelchair Using a Stand Pivot Transfer

This method of transfer is best used for someone who needs minimal assistance to stand.

- Tell him what you are about to do.
- Follow the instructions for setting up the wheelchair.
- Help him if necessary to sit at the edge of the bed.
- At the beginning of the transfer, he should be in a sitting position at the edge of the bed with his hips closest to the wheelchair and his knees and feet angled away from the wheelchair.
- Position your foot between his feet and your knee between his knees. Your other foot should be behind about 2 feet back, at a 45-degree angle. Your feet should be about a foot apart.
- Support him by placing your hands underneath and just past his armpits. Position your hands on the sides of his back, fingers pointing toward each other.
- Ask him to place his hands on the bed to help push up.
- Count 1-2-3 together out loud and on the count of 3, have him lean over slightly as he shifts his weight forward from his buttocks to his feet and pushes up with his hands. Shift your weight onto your back leg at the same time. Keep your back straight and knees bent. Help him into a standing position with one smooth continuous motion.
- When standing, support his lower back with your hands. Give him a moment to adjust in case of dizziness or imbalance.
- Continue to support him as he takes small steps, slowly turning toward the wheelchair.
- Stop when he can feel the edge of the chair seat on the back of both of his legs.
- With his knees slightly bent, have him reach back and put one hand on each armrest of the chair to guide himself into the chair.
- Keep your back straight, bend your knees, and use your leg muscles as you help to lower him into the chair.

Transferring a Person into a Vehicle

- Open the car door as far as possible and move the front seat of the car as far back as possible.
- Swing the foot supports out of the way or remove them. If you remove the foot support closest to the car, you will be able to move the chair as close to the car as possible.
- Place the wheelchair at a 45-degree angle to the car seat and set both of the wheel locks. The person should be sitting at the edge of the wheelchair.
- Position your knee that is farthest from the car door between his knees, with your other leg back at a 45-degree angle. If there isn't enough room, bend your knees and position your feet in a wide stance, keeping your center of gravity as low as you can to protect your back.
- Support him by placing your hands underneath and just past his armpits. Position your hands on the sides of his back, fingers pointing toward each other. If you are using a gait belt, grasp the belt at both sides of his waist.
- Have him place his hands on the armrests of the wheelchair to help push up.
- Count 1-2-3 together and on the count of 3, have him lean over slightly as he shifts his weight forward from his buttocks to his feet and pushes up with his hands. Use your legs, not your back, to help him into a standing position in one smooth continuous motion.
- Give him a few moments to adjust to the standing position.
- Support him while he takes small steps, turning toward the seat of the car.
- Protect his head and neck with one arm as you lower him into the car seat. Be aware of your body position. Bend at your knees; let your legs do the work, not your back.
- If necessary, help him lift his legs into the car.

Loading the Wheelchair into the Car

- Remove the foot plates and armrests and load them into the car first. This will eliminate some of the weight of the wheelchair.
- Fold the wheelchair and lock it in the collapsed position.
- Keep the chair as close to your body as possible.
- Use your legs to lift the chair into the car, while keeping your back straight.

How to Maneuver Ramps and Curbs

- When going down a ramp, go backwards, keeping your body between the wheelchair and the low end of the ramp. Keep your legs bent as you maneuver the chair down the ramp.
- When negotiating curbs, move the front of the wheelchair as close to the curb as possible. Use the tip bars located at the back and bottom part of the wheelchair to tip the front wheels onto the curb. Lift the rear wheels up the curb as you move the wheelchair forward. Use your legs to do the lifting.
- When going down a curb, go backwards. Position yourself with your back and the back of the wheelchair at the edge of the curb. Step down and lower the rear wheels first, and then use the tip bars to gently lower the front wheels.