

Wheelchair Safety

When using a wheelchair with any client one of the first things the caregiver should do is be certain that the chair is in proper operating condition. Items to check include the following:

- Are the wheels in good condition? Check for missing rubber, warping, wobbling when the chair is moving and broken or missing spokes.
- Are the footrests properly attached and do they swing securely in and out of position?
- Is the seat and backrest in good condition? Are there any tears or worn spots in the sling? If the chair is equipped with a gel type seat, is the gel still fluid or has it clumped up or hardened? It is also important to check the frame for any structural issues such as cracked welds and joints as well as any sharp edges that may cut the client or the provider.
- Are the wheel locks in proper operating condition? Do they properly hold the chair in place when engaged?
- Is the chair the proper type and size for your client? This may be a problem for a client who is obese or small in stature if they try to use a standard wheelchair.

One of the most common causes of injury to both a wheelchair user and a care provider is when the user is moving to and from the wheelchair, whether this is to and from a bed, car, commode or shower bench. There are a few basic steps that can be taken to greatly reduce the possibility of injury and these should be implemented in the standard practices for caregivers.

One of the most important steps in transitioning a client involves the “pivot” where you reposition the person to or from the wheelchair to another location. The ease of pivoting obviously depends on any limitations a client may have and the caregiver should ascertain the abilities of the client to support all or part of their weight. Such conditions as a stroke or someone who is recovering from a broken hip or leg would present conditions where a client may need extra help in transitioning.

If a client has some problem with assisting you in pivoting, there may be a need to use a device such as a gait belt that is placed snugly around the waist. This belt affords the caregiver a solid grip point that is in their “power zone” and greatly aids in helping the client maintain a stable posture through the pivot process.

As an example, let’s use the transition of a client from their bed to a wheelchair. First, the client should be moved to a sitting position on the edge of the bed with both feet on the floor. Then the wheelchair should be moved parallel to the bed and the wheels should be locked. Raise the

armrest on the side of the chair adjacent to the bed and swing the foot rests to the side so there is a clear path for the client to go from bed to chair.

If necessary, place the gait belt around the client's waist. Face the client and have them hold your forearms or upper arms and let them know that you will be helping them rise to a standing position and pivot to the wheelchair. It is important that you always let your client know what actions you are taking prior to actually performing the action.

Once the client is in a standing position, begin pivoting the client and maintain a steady grip on the client's arms or the gait belt. Once the client has turned and the back of their legs are in contact with the seating surface of the wheelchair, let them know that you are going to begin the sitting action.

Once the client is seated, return the armrest and footrests to their proper position. If the wheelchair is equipped with a seatbelt, it should be fastened at this time. Be certain that the client is properly positioned in the chair without slumping or tilting to one side.

You can now release the brake and move the wheelchair as needed. These actions would be similar if you are transiting from a chair, commode, shower or car and would basically be performed in reverse when returning to the wheelchair.

It is very important that the caregiver always wear footwear with a non-slip sole as this will greatly aid in safe and smooth transfers and reduce the potential for injury.



Some great resources on [Homewatch CareGivers University](#) are:

- Patient Mobility: Ambulation (P1182)
- Patient Mobility: Transfer Skills (P1181)
- Competency: Transfer Patient to Wheelchair and Transport (C1013)