

How to Provide Physical Assistance

Whether helping your passenger into the car, transferring from a wheelchair to the car, or handling a wheelchair (or other device, such as a walker), it is important to use proper body mechanics. Most muscle strain injuries to both the caregiver and the care receiver are preventable.

Body Mechanics

- Plan the lift—check the area for slippery spots or possible tripping hazards. Wearing appropriate footwear, non-skid heels and soles will be safer for both you and the person you are assisting.
- Use proper stance—spread your feet to a width that feels comfortable to you, usually shoulder’s width apart.
- Keep your head and upper body as upright as possible.
- Lower your hips to the height of the object you intend to lift by bending your knees and hips, rather than your back.
- Carry weight as close to your center of gravity as possible.
- Get close to the object you plan to lift.
- Bear weight on your forearms rather than your hands.
- Lift with your legs.
- Do not attempt to lift with your back alone.
- When lifting, do not rotate your spine; shift the position of your feet to turn (pivot).
- Know your limits.
- Push or pull an object, instead of lifting, whenever you can.

Wheelchair Transfers

- Have the person you are helping wear a “gait belt” (also called a “transfer belt”).
- Open the car door and stand with your back to the inside of the car door.
- Pull the wheelchair toward you—between the car door and the seat.
- Talk your passenger through the transfer process step by step so that he can assist if possible.
- Hold on to the gait belt and help him to a standing position—using your legs to pull up for strength.



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- Have your passenger lean weight forward toward you and put his arms around your shoulders (not your neck!).
- Carefully pivot yourself and your loved one so that his backside is toward the inside of the car.
- Help him sit on the seat with his legs still out of the car—be careful that his head clears the door frame while he is sitting down.
- Once sitting and given a moment to gain balance, help move his legs into the car (a swivel cushion is helpful for this).
- Assist with the seat belt and close the door before going to the driver's seat.

Some Suggested Equipment and Assistive Devices

- **Gait or Transfer Belt**—Assists caregiver in the safe transfer and movement of people with low mobility.
- **Transfer Board**—Allows transfer from a wheelchair to a car without lifting.
- **Swivel Seat Cushion**—Works like a “Lazy Susan”, making it easier to swing legs into car after sitting.

[SOURCE: Easter Seals “Caregiver Transportation Training” Project]

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