

Proper Lifting Techniques

Caring for the elderly, particularly those who are bedbound, tends to involve a great deal of lifting—including lifting from the bed, bath and wheelchair. You may even have to lift your care recipient at times after they have fallen on the floor.

Though you may not realize it at first, you will soon understand that this kind of work can be difficult and dangerous. If you don't follow some basic principles, you may injure your back—making your future as a caregiver more complicated. Improper lifting can also endanger the person for whom you are caring.

To avoid injuring yourself or the person you are lifting, it is a good idea to follow proper lifting procedures. The following are tips for protecting your back and making sure that the person you lift is safe:

- Wear comfortable, low shoes and loose, comfortable clothes.
- Stand facing the person, and let them know what you are doing.
- Make sure the pathway is clear and lock the wheels.
- Put your feet 10 to 12 inches apart, with one foot a little ahead of the other. This will give you support, and will also provide more support for the person you are lifting.
- Bend your knees, placing more weight on your front foot.
- Grasp the person, wrapping your arms around his or her body under his or her arms.
- Tighten the muscles in your abdomen.
- To stand up, straighten your knees, using the muscles in your legs and hips.



- As you stand, keep your upper body straight; this will give you a stronger sense of balance—keeping you from falling or dropping the person you are lifting. It will also protect your back.
- Arch your back inward, keeping your pelvis tilted forward.
- When carrying the person, keep him or her close to your body, near your waist. This is your body's center of gravity, and carrying someone here will prevent you getting back strain.
- When turning, move your feet; do not twist your back.
- Lower the person at the proper destination, bending your knees and keeping your upper body straight.

If, even after following these techniques, you still notice pain or discomfort in your back, make sure to seek your doctor's advice. It may be that the lifting and carrying that you are doing as a caregiver is exacerbating a previous back injury, and your doctor can advise you about possible treatment and about what precautions you can take. You may need to wear a back brace or use some other kind of back support. And you may decide as well, that a home health care worker or someone else can be brought in to lift and move your care recipient when needed.