

CARE FOR U PLUS

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Back Safety

Back strain or injury is one of the greatest risks that home health aides face. Using proper body mechanics is an important step in preventing back strain and injury. Body mechanics is the way the parts of the body work together whenever you move. Understanding some basic principles of body mechanics will help keep you and clients safe.

Alignment: When standing, sitting, or lying down, try to have your body in alignment. This means that the two sides of the body are mirror images of each other, with body parts lined up naturally. Maintain correct body alignment when lifting or carrying an object by keeping the object close to your body. Point your feet and body in the direction you are moving. Avoid twisting at the waist.

Base of support: The base of support is the foundation that supports an object. The feet are the body's base support. The wider your support, the more stable you are. Standing with your legs shoulder-width apart allows for a greater base of support. You will be more stable than someone standing with his feet together.

Center of gravity: The center of gravity in your body is the point where the most weight is concentrated. This point will be dependent on the position of the body. When you stand, your weight is centered in your pelvis. A low center of gravity gives a more stable base of support. Bending your knees when lifting an object lowers your pelvis and, therefore, lowers your center of gravity. This gives you more stability and makes you less likely to fall or strain the working muscles.

Proper Body Mechanics:

Lifting a heavy object from the floor: Spread your feet shoulder-width apart and bend your knees. Using the strong, large muscles in your thighs, upper arms, and shoulders, lift the object. Pull it close to your body, level with your pelvis. By doing this, you keep the object close to your center of gravity and base of support. When you stand up, push with your strong hip and thigh muscles. Raise your body and the object together.

Do not twist when you are moving an object. Always face the object or person you are moving. Pivot your feet instead of twisting at the waist.

To help a client sit up, stand up, or walk, protect yourself by assuming a good stance. Place your feet about 12 inches or shoulder-width, apart. Put one foot in front of the other, with your knees bent. Your upper body should stay upright and in alignment. Do this whenever you have to support a client's weight. If the client starts to fall, you will be in a good position to help support him or her. Never try to catch a falling client. If a client falls, assist him or her to the floor. If you try to reverse a fall in progress, you will probably injure yourself and/or the client.

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Bend your knees to lower yourself, rather than bending from the waist. When a task requires bending, use a good stance. This lets you use the big muscles in your legs and hips rather than smaller muscles in your back.

If you are making an adjustable bed, adjust the height to a safe working level, usually waist high. Avoid bending at the waist.

Tips to Avoid Strain and Injury:

- Assess the situation first. Clear the path. Remove any obstacles.
- Use both arms and hands to lift, push, or carry objects.
- Hold objects close to you when you are lifting or carrying them.
- Push objects and equipment rather than lifting them.
- Avoid bending and reaching as much as possible. Move or position furniture so that you do not have to bend or reach.
- Avoid twisting at the waist. Instead, turn your whole body. Your feet should point toward what you are lifting.
- When moving a client, let him know what you will do so he can help if possible. Count to three. Lift or move on three so everyone moves together.
- Report to your supervisor if your assignments include task that you feel you cannot safely perform. Never attempt to lift an object or a client that you feel you cannot handle.

Strategies that can help you apply good body mechanics in the home:

- **Have the right tools for a job.** For example, if you cannot reach an object on a high shelf, use a step stool rather than climbing on a counter or straining to reach.
- **Have footrests and pillows available.** For example, tasks that require standing for long periods can be more comfortable if you rest one foot on a footrest. This position flexes the muscles in the lower back and keeps the spine in alignment. When sitting, using a footrest allows for a more comfortable leg position. Crossing the legs disrupts alignment. It should be avoided. Using pillows can make any chair more comfortable. Using pillows behind the back to keep the back straight.
- **Keep tools, supplies, and clutter off the floor.** Keep frequently used items on shelves or counters where they can be easily reached without lifting. Keeping things organized will also help you find what you need without straining.
- **Sit when you can.** Whenever you can sit to do a job, do so. Chopping vegetables, folding clothes, and other tasks can be done easily while sitting. For jobs like scouring the bathtub, kneel or use a low stool. Avoid bending at the waist.
- **Use gait or transfer belts when assisting clients with ambulation or transfer.**