



**PEAK**  
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**Peak Development for ...  
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## **Safety: Client Transfer Preventing Work-Related Injury**

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Compare the risk of work-related injury in healthcare and other industries.
2. Identify risk factors for injury related to client handling.
3. Discuss measures to reduce the risk of injury related to client handling.

Work-related injury is a serious risk for healthcare workers. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), nursing assistants and home health aides are among the workers most likely to suffer work-related injuries. Most of these injuries are musculoskeletal disorders affecting the back, shoulders, and arms, and most are caused by overexertion in lifting or lowering. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that the greatest risk factor for these injuries is the manual lifting and moving of clients.



As a home health aide, your job responsibilities typically include helping to position and move, or transfer, clients who can't move themselves. You may reposition a client in bed, or transfer a client from the bed to the chair, from the toilet to the wheelchair, or any number of other areas. When you do this, the major concern is safety... both the client's and yours.

This newsletter will discuss safe client handling and the prevention of injury, including risk factors for injury, issues specific to home care, and practices to promote safety. Guidelines from major healthcare organizations will also be covered.

### **What's the Problem?**

Work-related injury is a serious issue in healthcare. According to the

BLS, more workers are injured in healthcare jobs than in any other industry in the US. Healthcare workers suffer musculoskeletal injuries at more than 7 times the national rate for other workers. The majority of these injuries result from client handling, and a significant number result in lost work time, a change to "light" duty, or leaving healthcare work. These injuries can happen suddenly during one incident, or more commonly, from trauma that accumulates over time. Also, heavy lifting or moving is not necessary to sustain injury. It may result from prolonged positions that strain the body, such as bending in an awkward way to feed or bathe a client or put on anti-embolism stockings.

Risk for injury is increased with clients who are tall, overweight or obese, and those who cannot:

- bear weight
- follow instructions or cooperate
- use upper body muscles to assist

Also, there are challenges unique to the homecare setting regarding safe client handling. Unlike hospitals and nursing homes, the home environment may not have adequate space, adjustable beds, lifting equipment, or other staff members to assist with client handling. These factors increase the risk of injury to the staff member and client.

A common myth is that correct use of body mechanics will prevent

injury during client handling. Publications from the CDC state that the use of “proper body mechanics” is not sufficient to prevent staff injury when moving clients. The CDC considers manual lifting of adult clients as “intrinsically unsafe,” and maintains that there is no safe way to manually lift another adult human being. The CDC recommends that mechanical lifts be used as part of a safe client lifting program. More than 80% of documented injuries occurred when lifting equipment was not used.

### **Promoting Safe Client Handling**

It is important to be familiar with your agency’s policies on client handling, and the assistive devices that are available. Before each new assignment, talk with the nurse about the client’s needs for positioning and transfer, and the available options to help. The mobility assessment done by the nurse on admission should provide this information.

The safe handling program developed by the CDC and several other major healthcare organizations recommends the following basic principles when handling clients:

- Maintain a wide, stable base of support with the feet apart
- Put the bed at the correct height, waist-high for providing care, hip-high for positions or transfers
- Keep the work or load directly in front to avoid twisting the spine
- Keep the client as close to your body as possible to avoid reaching



When assisting clients who can cooperate to position or move, give them clear, simple directions on how they can help. Lifting movements should be smooth and controlled, not jerky. The back should be kept straight. Any bending should be done with

your legs, not your back. Also, keep the area as clear and clutter-free as possible when positioning and moving clients. This helps to prevent twisting, turning, tripping or other possible causes of injury.

The CDC has suggested a lifting limit of 35 lb for healthcare workers. They acknowledge that any actual safe limit is usually much lower than this in real-life situations, such as lifting with arms extended, from the floor, with the trunk turned, or during an 8-hour shift. Even so, one leg of a client weighing 250 lb is estimated to weigh 39 lbs, which exceeds this limit. Therefore, many manual lifting situations, particularly in home care, will exceed this limit.

There are a variety of assistive devices that help to promote safety for the worker and client during handling. Using these can help to decrease the lifting load on the worker. Make sure that you have received thorough training, practice and supervision for any device before using it by yourself with clients. Also, make sure any equipment is in good working condition and without signs of damage.

**Friction-reducing devices:** Sliding sheets reduce friction and strain when moving a client across a surface. They are helpful for tasks such as re-positioning a client in bed, requiring much less force than using a draw sheet.

**Lateral transfer devices:** Clients can be moved from one surface to another with sliding or rolling boards and air mattresses. A sliding board is a firm, smooth plank that is placed under the client to slide him/her to the chair, bed or toilet. Transfers can also be assisted with an air mattress or a rolling board that uses covered ball bearings to slide the client between two flat surfaces, such as a bed and stretcher.

**Transfer belts:** These devices are placed around the client to provide a hold for the caregiver to support the client while standing and transferring. Clients must be able to bear some weight in order to use a transfer belt.

**Rolling shower/toilet chairs:** A rolling chair that can move from the bedside to over the toilet, and then into the shower, can reduce the need for many lifts and transfers between these frequently-used areas.

**Lifts:** These include sling lifts that stand on the floor or are mounted on the ceiling, for clients who cannot bear weight. Sit-to-stand lifts are used for clients that can bear weight, but need assistance to stand.



If you feel a client handling situation is not safe, notify your supervisor. Possible signs of overuse or injury affecting body parts should not be ignored. Report any pain, tingling, numbness or weakness, and seek medical attention. In many cases of cumulative injury, these signs may appear briefly and then go away. Without attention, they tend to become worse and last longer, and may eventually affect the ability to perform tasks.

By having knowledge of the client’s needs, and using appropriate equipment to assist in positioning and transferring, the home health aide can decrease the risk of musculoskeletal injury during client care.



**Safety: Client Transfer**  
**Preventing Work-Related Injury**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

- \_\_\_\_ 1. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that more workers are injured in healthcare jobs than in any other industry in the US.  
A. True  
B. False
- \_\_\_\_ 2. Most of the injuries to healthcare workers are:  
A. needlesticks  
B. musculoskeletal disorders  
C. stress-related disorders  
D. exposures to toxic chemicals
- \_\_\_\_ 3. Challenges in client handling that are specific to home care include the possible lack of:  
A. adjustable beds  
B. other staff members to help  
C. lifting equipment  
D. all of the above
- \_\_\_\_ 4. Most commonly, injuries occur in healthcare workers:  
A. when trauma accumulates over time  
B. suddenly, in a single incident  
C. when clients try to help with moving  
D. only when heavy lifting occurs
- \_\_\_\_ 5. Manual lifting and moving of clients is considered safe by the CDC and does not result in injury if proper body mechanics are used.  
A. True  
B. False

- \_\_\_6. Data from the CDC indicates that more than 80% of staff injuries occur when:
- A. clients are obese
  - B. clients fall unexpectedly
  - C. lifting equipment is not used
  - D. proper body mechanics are not used
- \_\_\_7. To prevent injury, which of the following should the home health aide do FIRST before starting a new client assignment?
- A. request assistive devices, such as slip sheets, to take to the home
  - B. arrange to have another home health aide assist with moving the client
  - C. do nothing until arriving at the home and seeing what is needed
  - D. get information from the nurse about the client's mobility needs
- \_\_\_8. Which of the following principles should be followed when moving or positioning a client:
- A. stand with your feet close together
  - B. keep the weight or load of the lift slightly to your right or left
  - C. keep the client as close to your body as possible
  - D. put adjustable beds as high as possible for providing care
- \_\_\_9. Which of the following is the most safe and effective equipment for re-positioning a client up toward the head of the bed?
- A. sliding board
  - B. transfer belt
  - C. slip sheet
  - D. draw sheet
- \_\_\_10. A home health aide notices that her right shoulder is sometimes painful after she helps her clients to re-position or stand up. As long as the pain goes away quickly and there is no swelling, she is safe from injury.
- A. True
  - B. False

