



Gait Belt Use

How to Promote Safety and Avoid Injury

Preparation is key when getting ready to perform a gait belt transfer. Here's what you should know:

- 1. Plan ahead:** Visualize your path. Move rugs, furniture, cords or pets that may interfere or cause you to trip.
- 2. Know who you are assisting:** Can they understand and follow directions? Do they have problems with balance? Are they weaker on one side? Are there medical conditions that may prevent gait belt use, such as a recent fracture or need for a feeding tube. If so, consult the primary caregiver and know the care plan.
- 3. Communicate:** Use a calm approach and a clear, warm tone. Introduce yourself and give simple step-by-step instructions. Be patient and allow the person you are caring for to go at their own pace. Wait and re-approach if there is anger or confusion.
- 4. Accessorize for success:** Non-slip footwear should be worn by the person you are caring for (such as, gripper socks or non-slip house shoes) and you. A gait belt should be placed on the person you are caring for if stated in the care plan or if they need added assistance with balance (this assumes they are able to bear weight, follow simple direction, cooperate and are non-combative).
- 5. Adjust bed height (if able):** Do this before placing the gait belt around the patient to lessen the stress on your back from bending over. Prior to standing the person, re-adjust the bed height so their feet are flat on the floor.
- 6. Lock wheels:** If assisting someone into or out of a wheelchair, place the wheelchair next to the bed/chair and lock the wheels.

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Performing the Gait Belt Transfer

- Place the gait belt low on hips and fasten it snugly. As a general rule, you should leave enough room to fit two finger widths between the body and belt.
- Never place a gait belt on bare skin.
- Position yourself in front of the person using a staggered stance (one foot more forward than the other; bend at the knees keeping your back upright).
 - Stay close to the person to prevent reaching. Maintain good body posture with back straight.
 - When transferring to the left, the right foot goes between the person's legs with the left foot pointed toward the left.
- When transferring to the right, the left foot goes between the person's leg with the right foot pointed towards the right.
- Grip the belt, one hand on each side of the person, with palms facing upward.
- Teamwork is key. Enlist the help of the individual being transferred. Talk through each step allowing them to do as much as possible:
 - Ask them to place their hands on arm rests or a seated surface. Their hands should never be on you.
 - Ask them to "scoot" forward on the bed, chair or wherever they are currently seated.
- Use a three-count (1-2-3) with slight rocking motion to position "Nose Over Toes." On the count of 3, guide the person to a standing position – do not lift! If you feel you are lifting or the person is unstable, stop the transfer. Lower them back to their seated position until it is safe to try again, or consider a safer method (such as a mechanical lift, if one is available).
- Once standing, allow the person to stabilize and gain balance before moving to the next place. If the belt is not low on the hips and still snug, adjust and tighten.

If Lowering to Another Surface (Chair, wheelchair, toilet)

- Complete move by asking them to move their feet, taking small steps until they are in line with the surface where they are to be lowered. The back of their legs should be touching the edge of that surface.
- Talk through each step, having them place their hands on armrests, or reaching back to feel the surface they are about to sit on, when lowering.
- Keep a good posture, maintain same grip of gait belt, bending at the knees until the person is seated comfortably.
- Remove the gait belt.

If Assisting with Walking

- Grip the gait belt next to the person's back, palm up.
- Stay close to the person; walk right alongside them.
- If needed, plan resting spots before getting to your destination.
- Be ready for a fall.
- If the person starts to fall, try to lower yourself alongside of them at the same time, bending your knees as you go down.
- Never try to hold the person up.
- Protect their head from hitting any hard surfaces.

Don't Forget!

- A gait belt is not a lifting device. The purpose of the gait belt is to help prevent injury not only for the person you are caring for but also for you!
- Make sure that gait belts are cleaned periodically or when soiled, according to manufacturer recommendations.

