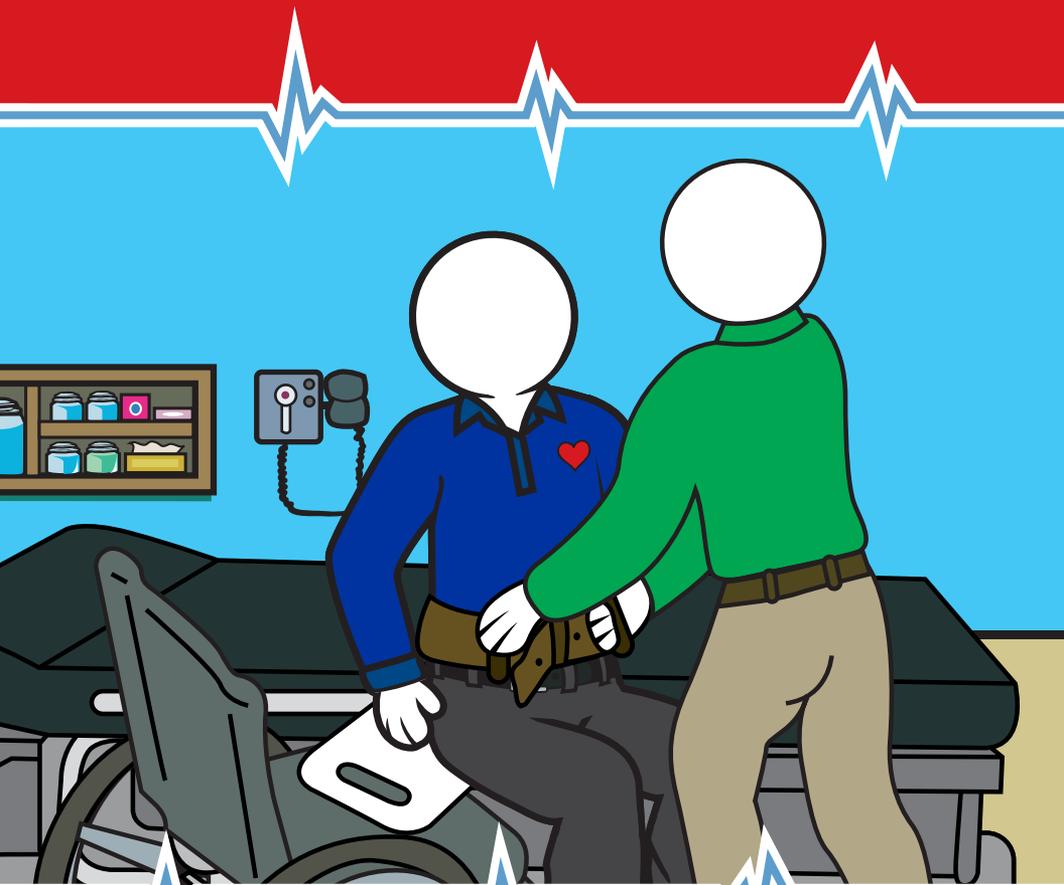


Safe Transfers:

Assisting Patients with Disabilities



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Inland Empire Health Plan

Introduction



Some individuals need assistance getting on and off exam tables, even when using tables that lower to 17 - 19 inches from the floor. Providers always should ask patients if they need help, the best way to go about it, and what extra equipment, if any, is needed.

Some people will need a lot of assistance, some will need only a steady hand, and others will find it safer and easier to transfer without assistance.

If patients are new to their disability or have a cognitive impairment, they may not be able to offer information about the best way to assist them. In these cases, check with the people who are with them, if present. Others will need assistance with tools such as a transfer sheet or board — a smooth, rigid material that bridges two surfaces over which the patient slides (See pg. 10 for details).

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Safety Overview

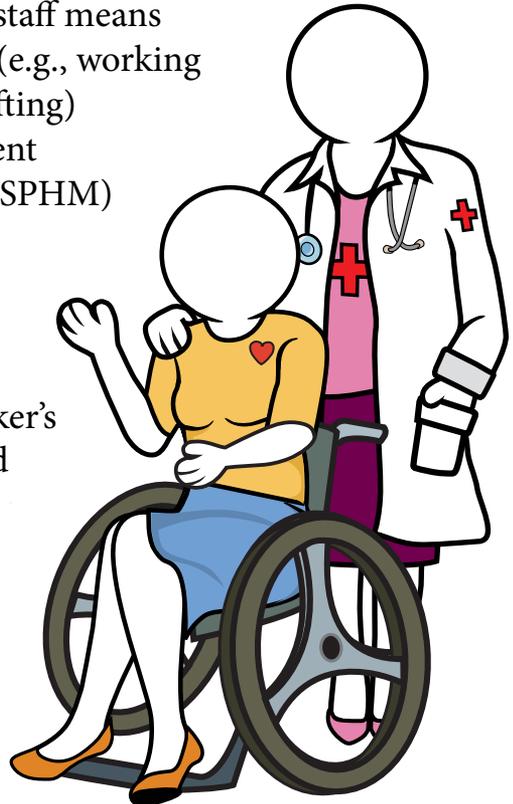
Using the proper method for transferring individual patients is important for keeping them safe and preventing worker injuries.

Transfers That Cause Injuries:

- Repositioning patients
- Transferring patients from table to wheelchair, walker, or toilet
- Supporting weight of semi-ambulatory individuals

Why So Many Injuries Occur:

- Healthcare workers often put patient comfort above their own to get the job done
- Longer shifts and fewer staff means more lifts with less help (e.g., working nurses restricted from lifting)
- Lack of proper Safe Patient Handling and Mobility (SPHM) lift equipment, teams, or training
- People can be heavy (e.g., a person's leg alone can exceed a health worker's recommended 35-pound lift limit)
- Unpredictable movements can prompt poor lift postures



Basic Transfer Techniques



Prepare the Patient:

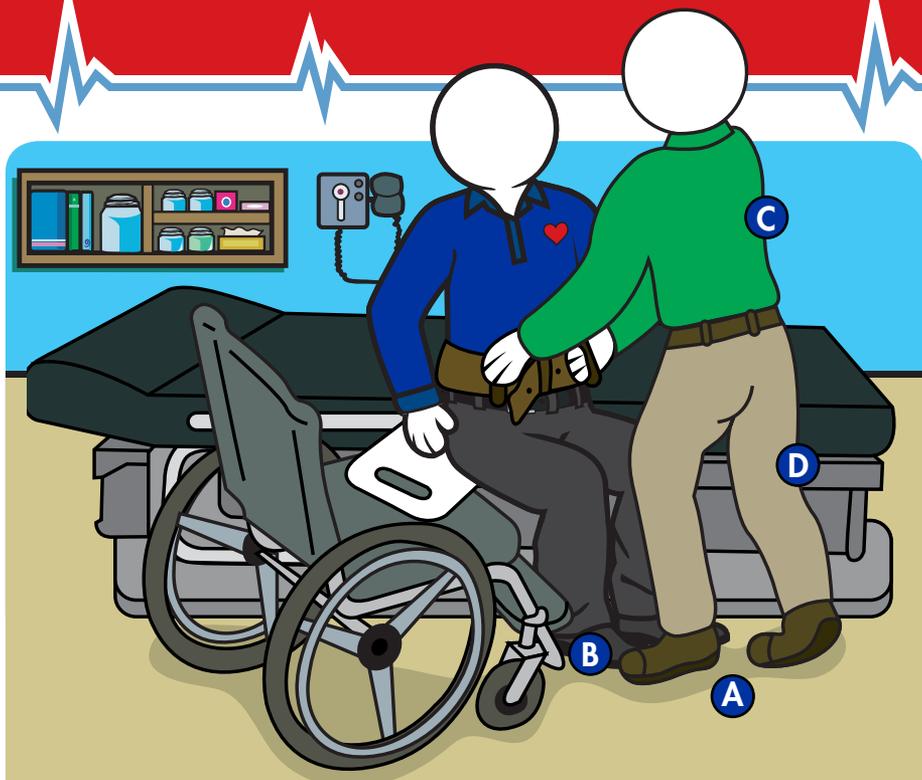
- Never assume individuals need help. Ask always, “*How can I best assist you?*” Listen carefully and incorporate what they tell you.
- Determine individuals’ mobility and how much they can help by asking if they need assistance.
- Explain what’s going to happen during the transfer.
- Use clear instructions “*Lean forward,*” “*Lift,*” and “*Swing.*”

Organize the Environment for Ease and Safety:

- Remove all possible obstructions from equipment or path of movement.
- Secure all necessary equipment, supplies, or get assistance before the transfer so you don’t have to leave the individual that you’re attending.
- Keep all surfaces as level as possible.

Prepare the Equipment:

- Raise or lower the exam table to maximize leverage.
- Lock brakes on all devices.
- If needed, remove wheelchair arm and leg rests, fold up foot plates, and put parts in one place.
- If applicable, align wheelchair or mobility device on the person’s strong side.
- Position equipment to create the smallest angles and shortest travel distance.
- Push chairs (non-wheelchair) against the wall to prevent sliding.



Prepare Yourself:

- A Maintain a Good Base of Support:** Keep your feet apart (one foot slightly forward), to strengthen your stance and center of gravity.
- B Never Reach or Stoop:** Point your feet in the direction of the weight and always keep it as close to you as possible.
- C Keep Your Back Straight:** Bend with your knees, not from your waist; pull your stomach in and lift your chin.
- D Don't Lock Your Joints:** Keep your weight forward and knees flexed to absorb shock.

Tips for Typical Transfers



Here's a checklist for two common types of transfers.

1. Helping individuals sit up for repositioning:

- Ask always, "*How can I best assist you?*"
When they know, listen carefully and incorporate what they tell you.
- Explain to individuals that you are going to reposition them. Raise or lower the table (if applicable) to optimal working level.
- Help them sit up.

2. Transferring people from exam table to wheelchair:

- Ask always, "*How can I best assist you?*"
- Adjust table height to maximize ease of transfer.
- Lock brakes.
- Explain to individuals that you're going to help them into a standing position.
- Ask individuals to place their hands on your arms or shoulders as if you were a walker.
- Block individuals' lower extremities with your feet (toes pointing slightly outward) to prevent slipping.
- Pivot toward the chair and ease person into it.



How can I best assist you?

Tips for Using Lift Equipment



Some people require total lift assistance and, because of their size, lift equipment may be needed. There are many different types of lifts available.

Assisted Transfer – with a Portable Floor Lift

- 1 Clearance beneath the exam table and an angled approach of the lift allows the patient to be positioned directly over the exam table for a safe transfer.
- 2 Ensure the individual is safe and able to maintain their balance on the exam table. If needed, help to position the individual on the table. Check by asking *“Are you safe on the table or should I wait with you until the doctor arrives?”*
- 3 Do not leave people unattended if there is any chance that they may not be safe on the table.
- 4 Record what worked for the patient in their record. Refer to these notes before the appointment, and always check with the patient to make sure the information is still correct.

Portable Floor Lifts

A common lift is one with wheels on a U-shaped base that fits around the bottom end of an exam table, or fully or partially under it at a perpendicular angle. Some lifts require only one operator; others are more easily operated by two or more people. An advantage of portable floor lifts is they can be moved from room to room for use with multiple exam tables — provided procedures for sharing and storage are in place to prevent scheduling conflicts.





While portable lifts are less expensive than overhead ones, they require more space for both in-room maneuvering and storage.

Medical staffs will likely need training on equipment operation and safe patient handling techniques to ensure transfers are done properly.

Notes about Portable Floor Lifts:

- The amount of floor space needed to maneuver will depend on the type of floor lift equipment used
- Portable floor lifts must be able to position patients over the exam table; select a model that is compatible with the table and room configuration
- A low-height, adjustable-width base can move closer to the end of the exam table and can be narrowed for transit and storage
- A low-height, adjustable width base permits the lift to be positioned at the end of the examination table

Assisted Transfer – with Transfer Board & Gait Belt with Handles



Types of Safe Patient Handling and Mobility (SPHM) Solutions

Consider reducing strenuous lifting by creating or adopting SPHM policies and training, and by purchasing lift equipment.

Examples include:

- “A “Minimal Lift Program” where nurses and other health workers can work together
- Lift “Coaches” who work with staff to promote safety
- Height-adjustable exam tables

Think before you lift!



Resources



[*How To Be Barrier Free*](#)

This 10-minute Midmark Medical video explores how exam tables reduce patient transfer injuries and make clinic visits more accessible to a growing population of seniors and individuals with disabilities.

[*Safe Patient Handling and Mobility*](#)

Section of the American Nurses Association website features videos, PDFs, and links to publications, media coverage, and lobbying efforts in support of safe patient handling standards.

[*Association of Safe Patient Handling Professionals \(ASPHP\)*](#)

Provides information on certification and links to a wide range of resources, including webinars, publications, case studies, and legislative updates.

[*Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare \(AOHP\)*](#)

Main website of the AOHP, an organization dedicated to promoting the health, safety, and well-being of health care workers through advocacy, education, and research.

[*Safe Patient Handling: The Lift Coach Model*](#)

This Risk Authority video (Stanford Medical) introduces the “lift coach” model for SPHM, promoted as more cost effective than lift teams and minimal lift programs.

Provider Relations Team Contact Information

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