

Body Mechanics¹

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Good Body Mechanics: What It Is and Why It's Important

What is good body mechanics?

Body mechanics is about how you move your body. “Good” body mechanics means using your strongest muscles so you don’t get hurt.

How does good body mechanics help the PA?

Good body mechanics lets you:

- Avoid getting hurt
- Be as strong as possible
- Do your job faster

How does good body mechanics help the consumer?

Good body mechanics lets the consumer:

- Avoid getting hurt when moved
- Trust PAs more
- Worry less about being moved

Using Good Body Mechanics

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There are four basic rules to good body mechanics. But they all begin with good posture.

What is good posture?

- Hold your head up.
- Keep your neck straight.
- Keep your chest high.
- Hold your shoulders back.
- Tighten your stomach muscles.
- Pull in your buttocks.

When should you use good posture?

Good posture helps you save energy and avoid muscle strain—even when you aren't lifting or moving something. Use good posture when you:

- Assist consumers to change position
- Lift or move things
- Sit
- Stand

What are the four rules?

Rule 1: Keep a wide base of support.

Move your feet apart to the width of your shoulders. Put one foot a little bit in front of the other. This helps you keep your balance.

Using Good Body Mechanics

Rule 2: Lift with your legs and buttocks.

Bend your knees. Keep your back straight. Then push up with your legs. This puts less strain on your back. And it helps you lift heavier things. **Never** bend from the waist.

Rule 3: Turn your whole body.

Move your feet and legs to face the person or thing you're lifting. This puts less strain on your back. And it keeps you from twisting your spine. **Never** turn at the waist.

Rule 4: Get close to what you're lifting.

Work at the level of your waist, if possible. This puts less strain on your back and saves energy. **Never** reach for or move something above your head.

Review—Good Body Mechanics:

- Use good posture.
- Keep a wide base of support.
- Lift with your legs and buttocks.
- Turn your whole body.
- Get close to what you're lifting.

Build Your Skills: Lifting an Object

Use good posture.
Hold your head up. Keep your shoulders back and your chest high. Tighten your stomach muscles. Pull in your buttocks.
Keep a wide base of support.
Spread your feet apart to the width of your shoulders.
Put one foot a little bit in front of the other.
Lift from your legs and buttocks.
Bend your knees to reach down. Do not bend at the waist.
Keep your back straight.
Push up with your legs.
Turn your whole body.
Move your feet and legs to face the thing you are lifting.
Do not turn at the waist.
Get close to what you're lifting.
Hold the thing at waist level. Work at waist level, if possible.
Do not reach out when lifting.
Use a ladder or step stool to reach or lift things above your head.

Tips for Lifting and Moving

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In addition to good posture and good body mechanics, here are some other ways to lift objects and assist people to move without getting hurt.

Syd's tip—Dress right.

“When I go to work, I wear loose clothes. I wear comfy shoes that don't slip. Sometimes I wear a back belt, too.”

Joy's tip—Plan the move.

“Before I move something, I make sure there's nothing in the way. And I check that the place I'm going is ready.”

Dave's tip—Push, pull, or roll.

“If I need to move something heavy, I try not to lift it. If I can push or pull it—or even better—use a cart to roll it, that's what I do.”

Angel's tip—Don't lift over your head.

“If I need to lift something heavy over my head, or get it down, I get a sturdy chair or ladder to get up to that level. And then I ask someone to take it from me. If no one else is there, I might have to move it in stages.”

Sara's tip—Get help.

“Some things are just too big or heavy for me. So I ask for help. I explain what I'm going to do and what I want the other person to do. I count 1-2-3, and then we move together.”

Mike's tip—Talk to the consumer.

“When I move a person, I tell them what I'm going to do and when. And I tell them what they can do to help.”

Tips for Lifting and Moving

Roberta’s tip—Don’t lift consumers.

“I was surprised in my training when I learned that we can really hurt ourselves *and* consumers if we try to pick them up and move them. Instead of lifting people, I learned how to “transfer” a person—which means working with the consumer to move himself or herself, usually in stages. If transferring isn’t an option, I always ask another person to help me lift the consumer or use special lift equipment. And we need special training to use that equipment, too.”

Mira’s tip—Stay fit.

“My muscles and joints work better when I’m in good shape. So I eat right and try to exercise a couple of times a week. Even a walk is good to help me stay fit.”

Lynn’s tip—Get enough sleep.

“When my muscles are tired, I get hurt more easily. And when my brain is tired, I might forget to use good body mechanics. So I make sure to get plenty of sleep.”

Review—Tips for Lifting and Moving:

- Dress right.
- Plan the move.
- Push, pull, or roll.
- Don’t lift over your head.
- Get help if you need it.
- Talk to the consumer.
- Don’t lift consumers.
- Stay fit.
- Get enough sleep.

Build Your Skills: Assisting the Consumer to Stand from Bed

Prepare yourself and the consumer
1. Wash your hands.
2. Talk with the consumer about assisting them to stand from bed—what they want to do for themselves and how you will assist. Provide privacy.
Position bed and chair or assistive device
3. If a hospital bed is being used, lock the wheels of the bed.
4. A) If preparing for transfer to a wheelchair or chair, bring the wheelchair or chair close to the bed, with the arm of the chair almost touching the bed. Make sure the chair won't move (for a wheelchair, lock the wheels). B) If preparing to use a walker, cane, or crutches, bring those within reach.
5. If transferring to a wheelchair, place a pillow, folded blanket, towel, or cushion on the seat of the wheelchair. Fold the footrests out of the way.
8. Raise or lower the bed to a level where the consumer can sit on the side with feet flat on the floor.
Assist consumer to sitting position on edge of bed
9. Ask the consumer to move to the side of the bed. Assist as needed.
10. If hospital bed is being used, raise the head of the bed. Allow the consumer to lie on their side, with their head raised, for a couple of minutes.

Build Your Skills: Assisting the Consumer to Stand from Bed

Handout 5

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| 11. Put one arm around the consumer’s shoulders. Put the other arm under the consumer’s knees. Bend your knees; spread your feet apart. Count 1-2-3 and rock back. While you do this, slowly swing the consumer’s legs over the side of the bed and help them to sit up. Their feet should be flat on the floor. |
| 12. Allow the consumer to sit for a couple of minutes. Put a chair in front of the consumer for support, if needed. |
| 13. Put nonskid shoes on the consumer’s feet. |
| Assist consumer to stand |
| 14. Explain again what the next steps will be—what the consumer will do and what you will do. |
| 15. Stand in front of the consumer, with your feet apart and back straight. Bend your knees so that your shoulders are at about the same level as the consumer’s. Put your knees against the consumer’s knees to help keep their legs steady. |
| 16. Put your arms under the consumer’s arms. Lock your fingers behind them, or grasp one of your wrists with your other hand. Ask the consumer to put their arms around your neck or shoulders, like a hug. |
| 17. Count 1-2-3, rocking slightly. On “3” you and the consumer both begin to slowly straighten your legs and stand up. |
| 18. Wait a moment and make sure the consumer is steady before continuing. |
| 19. Bring assistive device to consumer and assist as needed while they use it. Or continue with transfer to chair or wheelchair. |

Build Your Skills: Assisting the Consumer to Transfer from Bed to Wheelchair or Chair

Assist consumer to stand
1. Bring the chair next to the bed with the arm of the chair almost touching the bed. Make sure the chair won't move (for a wheelchair, lock the wheels).
2. Place a pillow, folded blanket, towel, or cushion on the seat of the chair. For a wheelchair, fold the footrests out of the way.
3. Follow the steps in Handout 5 to assist the consumer to stand up from bed.
Assist consumer to pivot and sit in chair
4. Continue holding on to each other. Take small steps together, and gradually turn your whole body toward the chair. Stop when the consumer's back is toward the chair and both of the consumer's legs are against the seat.
5. You continue to hold the consumer. Ask the consumer to take their arms away from your shoulders and reach back for the chair arms, to help steady themselves.
6. Count 1-2-3, and slowly bend your knees and hips (together) to lower the consumer into the chair.
Make sure the consumer is safe and comfortable
7. Ask the consumer to move their hips until it is against the back of the chair. Assist if needed.
8. If using a wheelchair, put the footrests down and position the consumer's feet on them.
9. Assist the consumer to get comfortable. Bring a blanket, if requested. If using a wheelchair, assist them to go where they want to go.
10. Wash your hands.
11. Report anything unusual you observed during the transfer.

Build Your Skills: Assisting the Consumer to Get Up from a Chair to Use a Walker²

Get ready
1. Ask what assistance the consumer would like, if any.
2. Be safe: Check the rubber tips on the walker. Make sure the consumer is wearing non-slip shoes. Make sure the chair won't slide. If using a wheelchair, back it against a wall (if possible); lock the brakes.
3. Place the walker in front of the chair and as close as possible to the chair.
Assist consumer to stand (if needed) and grasp walker handles
4. The consumer moves forward to the front of their seat. Assist as needed with each of these next steps.
5. The consumer places both hands on the armrests of their chair. (NEVER take hold of the walker handles before standing up and getting steady.)
6. The consumer places both feet flat on the floor and about 12 inches apart for a good base of support.
7. The consumer leans forward with shoulders directly above the knees.
8. The consumer pushes with their arms and legs to a standing position.
9. The consumer takes hold of the walker using one hand at a time.
10. The consumer gets stable and balanced prior to using the walker. (see Handout 8)

² Adapted from “Transferring,” Center on Aging Without Walls, University of Missouri HES Extension, <http://cas.umkc.edu/casww/transfrg.htm>

Build Your Skills: Assisting the Consumer to Get Up from a Chair to Use a Walker

Assist consumer to sit (after using the walker)
11. The consumer approaches the chair from the side. (Make sure the chair is stable and won't slide. If they are going to sit back down in a wheelchair, make sure the brakes are locked.)
12. The consumer turns, with the walker, until his or her back is facing the chair.
13. The consumer backs up until the backs of the knees touch the front of the chair seat.
14. The consumer reaches back with one hand at a time to grasp each arm of the chair.
15. The consumer leans forward, bends the knees and hips, and lowers him or herself into the chair.

Assistive Devices for Ambulation

Assistive devices for ambulation are types of equipment that make it easier for consumers to get around (ambulate).

- Canes and walkers make it easier for consumers to keep their balance while walking.
- Crutches make it easier to get around when one leg is weak.
- Wheelchairs let the consumer roll along when both legs are weak.

Sometimes, consumers want or need your assistance to use a cane, walker, crutches, or wheelchair. **Always ask BEFORE you start to assist them.** If they say yes, make sure you are clear about what *they* want you to do. Handouts 9-12 give guidelines for assisting consumers to use these devices.

Kinds of Walkers

- Folding walker
- Walker with wheels and hand brakes
- One-button foldaway
- Walker with wheels

Kinds of Canes

- Single tipped cane
- Trip-pod cane
- Four point or quad cane
- Ortho cane with handle

Kinds of Crutches

- Forearm crutches with release handles keep arms in place.
- Platform crutches allow for weight bearing in the forearms and for greater stability.

Note: Most older adults do not use standard crutches (that fit under the armpit).

Guidelines for Assisting a Consumer to Use a Walker

To assist a consumer to use a walker:

- Make sure the consumer is wearing shoes that won't slip.
- Make sure the rubber tips on the walker are in good shape. Take off any items that are hanging from the walker.
- Put the walker about 1 foot in front of the consumer. Make sure all 4 wheels or legs are on the ground.
- Ask if the consumer wants assistance to stand (see Handout 7).
- Ask the consumer if they want assistance with using the walker.

If they say yes, ask what kind of assistance. If needed, you can remind them to:

- Grasp the walker handles (or bar) with both hands, one on each side.
 - Stand steady and move the walker forward with their hands.
 - Then move one foot at a time toward the walker.
- Walk beside the consumer as the consumer uses the walker.

Guidelines for Assisting a Consumer to Use a Cane

To assist a consumer to use a cane:

- Make sure the consumer is wearing shoes that won't slip.
- Make sure the rubber tip on the cane is in good shape.
- Put the cane where the consumer can reach it.
- Assist the consumer to stand (if needed/requested).
- Ask the consumer if they need assistance with using the cane.

If they say yes, ask what kind of assistance they would like. If needed, you may remind them to:

- Move the cane first, then the weaker leg, and then the stronger leg.
- If your right leg is weak, hold the cane in your left hand.
- If your left leg is weak, hold the cane in your right hand.
- Walk next to the consumer **on their weaker side** as they use the cane.

Guidelines for Assisting a Consumer to Use Crutches

To assist a consumer to use crutches:

- Make sure the consumer is wearing shoes that won't slip.
- Make sure the rubber tips on the crutches are in good shape.
- Put the crutches where the consumer can reach them.
- Assist the consumer to stand (if needed/requested).
- Ask the consumer if they need tips on how to use crutches.

If they say yes, tell them to:

- Lean on the hand bars.
- Move the crutches forward; then bring their legs forward.
- Walk next to the consumer as they use the crutches.

Guidelines for Assisting a Consumer to Use a Wheelchair

To assist a consumer to use a wheelchair:

- Ask the consumer if he or she wants you to assist. (Not all consumers need to be transferred, but most will need some assistance.) If they say yes, ask what they want you to do.
- There are many different types of wheelchairs—including manual and electric. **DO NOT ASSUME THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO ASSIST UNTIL THE CONSUMER HAS TOLD YOU WHAT TO DO WITH HIS/HER PARTICULAR WHEELCHAIR.**
- Make sure both wheel brakes are locked before the consumer gets into or out of the chair.
- Follow the steps in Handout 6 to transfer the consumer to the wheelchair.
- Assist the consumer to use the foot rests, if needed.
- Make sure the consumer is comfortable and safe before releasing the brakes.
- Make sure that the consumer's clothing or blanket does not trail behind or get caught in the wheels.
- Pull the wheelchair backwards up steps or curbs.
- Back up the wheelchair when going:
 - Over bumps
 - Down a hill