

Risks of Caregiver Injury in Patient Bed Transfers

A cruelly ironic truth is that nurses and other caregivers assisting injured and ill patients often wind up injured themselves. In fact, the caregiver profession has among the highest rates of injury, with back injuries being the most common and the most debilitating. Every year, more than 10% of caregivers leave the field because of back injuries. More than half of all caregivers will experience chronic back pain.

Why Back Injuries Occur

Most back injuries to caregivers happen when lifting patients from beds. Injuries can occur instantly, but they can develop over time as well, often without the caregiver's awareness. For example, the caregiver can sustain disc damage gradually and not feel any pain, and by the time he or she does experience pain, there can already be serious damage.

Three principal factors contribute to the occurrence of injury, and one of them is becoming worse all the time, with little caregivers can do about it.

That one is patient weight. Even light patients can be difficult to lift, and with obesity on the rise, caregivers have to exert more and more force to lift and move them, creating more strain on their backs.

The other two are repetition and awkward posture. Performing the same tasks on a regular basis imposes ever-increasing stress on the body parts used. Tight spacing and the fact that a human body is simply not easy to move or lift often place caregivers in body positions that are not ideal for moving and lifting heavy loads.

Other factors that add to the risk of injury include workforce aging, inadequate staffing, and long shifts.

Consequences to Caregivers

Many caregivers change professions due to injuries, but whether they do or not, there are several other consequences.

First is the pain resulting from the injury, and with that often come the hardships and the inconveniences that accompany treating and recovering from these injuries. This can be expensive in two ways: the treatment itself and, when the injury is severe enough to keep the caregiver from work, loss of income.

And, unfortunately, many who suffer serious back injuries will endure chronic pain that can change one's life forever.

How To Lift Safely

Common advice for avoiding back injuries is to get stronger and improve lifting techniques. Although that may work well at the gym, it does not work for caregivers in the context of performing their duties.

According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the maximum safe force of load on the lumbar spine (lower back) is 764 pounds. That may sound reassuring, but NIOSH also says that the force exerted by one person lifting a patient without using specialized equipment can range from 1424 to 2062 pounds; for two, that range can be from 858 to 1476 pounds.

Let's not forget repetition, either. 90% of women can safely lift up to 31 pounds on a repeated basis, and 10% can manage 51 pounds. For 90% of males, 51 pounds is the limit for safe repeated lifting, and 10% can safely lift up to 121 pounds repeatedly. Now consider that among human beings, 100 pounds is considered "light" and caregivers commonly have to lift patients weighing 250 pounds or more.

Mechanical devices, then, are the way to safely and efficiently lift patients. In addition to the benefits for caregivers, there are benefits for patients as well, among them being better organ function, fewer falls, and an improved sense of dignity.

UpLyft

Nurses and other caregivers should not be lifting patients without mechanical assistance, and this is where UpLyft, a revolutionary new device, provides a solution to the difficult, often-painful problem of lifting and moving patients on a regular basis.

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