

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Back Care – Safety First, Don’t Get Hurt!

As a caregiver, you will have to help the person in your care move to a chair or be asked to pick up a heavy object. Though this seems simple, it is very easy to be injured doing this and left unable to perform your caregiving duties. Attention to the *safest* way to move your body—and the person in your care—will keep you from unnecessary injury. Most muscle strain injuries to both the caregiver and care receiver are preventable if you follow some simple rules.

### Body Mechanics

The proper use of our bodies is called *body mechanics*. It involves standing and moving in ways that prevent injury, avoid fatigue, and make the best use of strength. When you learn how to move, control and balance your own body, it’s easier to control and help or move another person.

### Preventing Back and Neck Pain

To prevent injuries to yourself, get plenty of rest and maintain:

- Good nutrition.
- Physical fitness.
- Good body mechanics.
- A stress management program such as daily meditation.
- A stretching routine before you lift.
- A back strengthening exercise program.



No pulling!

### General Rules

The following hints will help you use proper body mechanics and be safe.

- ✓ Only lift as much as you can comfortably handle.
- ✓ Always let the person you are helping know what you are going to do.
- ✓ To create a base of support, stand with your feet 8”–12” apart with one foot a half step ahead of the other.
- ✓ Bend your knees slightly.
- ✓ Keep your spine in a neutral (normal arched, not stiff) position while lifting.
- ✓ USE YOUR LEGS instead of your back to do most of the work—leg muscles are stronger than back muscles.
- ✓ If you can adjust the bed, keep the top at about waist level. If it is low or you are tall, put one foot on a footstool to relieve pressure on your lower back.

Article continues  
on page 2

## The Golden Rule . . .

First, consider the task at hand. Think about what you are capable of, what assistance you might need and to what degree the one in your care can assist you. Then, eliminate hazards such as clutter, throw rugs, or excess furniture. When planning on the space you need to move, pivot, or transfer, allow for *more* space than you think you need.

Remember these tips:

- ☛ Let the person you are helping do as much as he can do safely.
- ☛ Never allow the person you are helping to put his arms around your neck.
- ☛ Have the person PUSH off rails, chair arms, etc. (No pulling)
- ☛ Avoid sudden jerking movements; move slowly and communicate what you are doing and need the person to do. Remember, if the person in your care does not move often, he may become lightheaded with a change in position—**move slowly!**
- ☛ Have all equipment you need ready and in working order, such as a transfer belt, chair, wheelchair, commode, or Hoyer lift. If transferring to or from a bed, wheelchair or commode with locking brakes, make sure they are locked.
- ☛ If, during a transfer, you start to “lose” the person, do not try to hold him up. Doing so will probably result in injury. Instead, lower him slowly to the floor and call for assistance.



## Daily Back Strengthening Exercises

- **Hug Your Knees**—Lie on your back with knees bent and soles on the floor. Use your arms to hug one knee at a time to your chest. Ten times each knee.
- **Flatten Your Back**—Lie on your back with knees bent and soles on the floor. Take deep breaths as you tighten your abdominal muscles and press the small of your back into the floor. Hold to a count of 15 as you continue to breathe deeply.
- **Chest Lift**—Lie on your stomach in a relaxed position. Put your hands palms down at chest level and raise your head and chest from the floor. Breathe and hold this position for a count of 25. Gradually increase the time you are able to remain in this position.



Don't expect miracles; these back strengthening exercises will take time to have an effect, but continue them, even after your back feels stronger. And, no matter how strong your back feels, always use proper body mechanics!

Remember to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

## Taking Care of Yourself— Don't Be a Couch Potato

According to latest figures, the world population has become disturbingly inactive. A big percentage of adults and teens alike are into a completely sedentary lifestyle, meaning they are not able to meet the minimum requirement for moderate activity or exercise. Alarming facts about inactivity:

- ✓ Being inactive translates to heart disease, diabetes, breast and colon cancer, and other life-threatening diseases.
- ✓ Sitting around most of the day is as deadly as smoking or obesity.
- ✓ Even if physically active, a person who sits around for 3 hours or more, shaves his life expectancy off by two years.
- ✓ Watching TV for two hours shaves life expectancy by another 1.4 years.

People should adopt a more active lifestyle by spending about 150 minutes per week in walking or other moderate activities.



## Note – Your Weight Matters

Obesity is one of the biggest risk factors for developing back pain and arthritis because it speeds the destruction of joint-cushioning cartilage. Losing weight—even just 10 or 11 pounds—can cut your risk in half.

Source: *Harvardhealth*

## Live Life Laughing!

Try this for back pain, I just bought a hundred shares.



## Inspiration

*If you fix the problem you won't have to fix the blame.*

## Don't Fall – Be Safe

More than 90% of older adults have at least one chronic condition like diabetes, stroke, or arthritis. Often, these increase the risk of falling because they result in lost function, inactivity, depression, pain, or multiple medications.

*The Comfort of Home*<sup>®</sup>

### **Our Purpose**

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

### **Ordering Info**

From the publishers of  
*The Comfort of Home*<sup>®</sup>  
Caregiver Series

#### **available from...**

CareTrust Publications LLC  
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296  
800-565-1533  
or [www.comfortofhome.com](http://www.comfortofhome.com)

Comments and suggestions welcome.

©2015 CareTrust Publications LLC.  
All rights reserved. Reproduction of any component of this publication is forbidden without a license from the publisher.

Some content in this publication is excerpted from *The Comfort of Home: Caregivers Series*. It is for informational use and not health advice. It is not meant to replace medical care but to supplement it. The publisher assumes no liability with respect to the accuracy, completeness or application of information presented or the reader's misunderstanding of the text.

## **SAFETY TIPS—Back Pain and Activity**

A common myth about back pain is that you need to rest and avoid activity for a long time. In fact, doctors do *not* recommend bed rest. If you have no sign of a serious cause for your back pain (such as loss of bowel or bladder control, weakness, weight loss, or fever), stay as active as possible.

Here are tips for how to handle back pain and activity:

- ★ Stop normal physical activity for only the first few days. This helps calm your symptoms and reduce swelling (inflammation) in the area of the pain.
- ★ Apply heat or ice to the painful area. Use ice for the first 48 to 72 hours, then use heat.
- ★ Take over-the-counter pain relievers.
- ★ Sleep in a curled-up, fetal position with a pillow between your legs. If you usually sleep on your back, place a pillow or rolled towel under your knees to relieve pressure.
- ★ Do not do activities that involve heavy lifting or twisting of your back for the first 6 weeks after the pain begins.
- ★ Do not exercise in the days right after the pain begins. After 2 to 3 weeks, slowly begin to exercise again. A physical therapist can teach you which exercises are right for you.

Source: *National Institutes of Health MedlinePlus*

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

As the caregiver, you should seek training from a physical therapist in order to reduce the risk of injury to yourself or the person in your care. A therapist will help correct mistakes you make and can take into account special problems. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Most muscle strain injuries to both the caregiver and care receiver are preventable if you follow some simple rules.  
T F
2. *Body mechanics* involves standing and moving in ways that prevent injury, avoid fatigue, and make the best use of strength.  
T F
3. Always let the person you are helping know what you are going to do.  
T F
4. Use your back muscles to do most of the work.  
T F
5. If the person in your care does not move often, he may become lightheaded with a change in position.  
T F
6. If you feel any back pain you need to avoid activity for a long time.  
T F
7. Keep your spine in a neutral (normal arched, not stiff) position while lifting.  
T F
8. Have the person PUSH off rails, chair arms, etc. (No pulling)  
T F
9. If, during a transfer, you start to “lose” the person, lower him slowly to the floor.  
T F
10. Never use ice on a sore back muscle.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_