

Safe Transfer Techniques for Caregivers

Bed, chair, toilet, and car — moving safely together

CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Transfers — moving between bed, chair, toilet, and car — are one of the most common times falls happen. A few consistent habits protect both the person you're caring for and your own back.

Before Every Transfer

- Lock or brace anything that could move — wheelchair brakes, bed wheels, walker — before starting.
- Clear the path: remove rugs, cords, and clutter between the two surfaces.
- Position surfaces close together and at a similar height when possible.
- Tell the person what's about to happen and what you need them to do ("scoot forward," "push through your hands").
- Have footwear on with good grip — never transfer in loose socks alone.

Bed to Chair / Wheelchair

- Have the person scoot to the edge of the bed and place feet flat on the floor before standing.
- Position the chair at a slight angle (about 45°) next to the bed, not straight across a gap.
- Let them push up through their hands and legs — you are there for balance and guidance, not to lift.
- Pivot using small steps rather than twisting at the waist, for both of you.

Toilet Transfers

- A raised toilet seat or grab bars reduce how far someone has to lower and how hard they must push to stand.
- Encourage reaching for a fixed grab bar rather than a towel rack or sink, which can pull loose.
- Give a clear verbal countdown ("ready, set, stand") so effort is coordinated, not surprised.

Car Transfers

- Park to allow the door to open fully; move the car seat back as far as it goes.
- Have the person sit on the seat edge first, then swing both legs in together, keeping knees higher than hips if possible.
- A transfer aid (slide board or swivel cushion) can help if standing tolerance is limited.

Protect your own back: keep your feet apart, bend your knees rather than your back, and stay close to the person you're assisting. If you feel yourself lifting their full body weight, stop — that's a sign more equipment or a second person is needed.

Ask for help if: the person can no longer bear weight through their legs, transfers have become a struggle for either of you, or a fall has occurred during a transfer. A physical or occupational therapist can teach a technique suited to your specific home setup.