Mobility 4.4: How to Transfer from Wheelchair to Bed

Hi guys, I'm Justin with Therafit Rehab and today we're going to be talking about transferring your loved one, a caregiver transferring a patient, or just really picking something up; I mean it this really boils down to just being having good body mechanics when you're lifting something. So today we're going to be talking specifically about the importance of preparing yourself to transfer somebody and then safely and effectively transferring somebody we're going to be transferring onto the mat table then back over.

But we're talking really about a dependent transfer, so this is somebody that needs a maximum amount of assistance to be able to transfer from one surface to another, and we're going to be more importantly talking about how you can effectively transfer somebody without hurting your spine. So, there are really three different things that we want to avoid when you're transferring somebody and that is: we don't want to herniate a disc, or we don't want a disc to be bulging from lifting, and we don't want to hurt the muscles surrounding our spine when we're transferring.

So, there's really four main things that you want to watch out for when you're making this kind of transfer and I'm going to talk about those real quick, and then I'm going to give you some even greater pointers that I've learned in the 10 years of doing this, just the things that I've picked up on from just transferring lots of different people with lots of different disabilities and the things that I've learned to help keep myself safe so that I could be doing this, you know, seven hours a day and transferring people and keeping myself safe in the in the meantime.

So, the first thing that we want to watch out for and that everybody has heard but people have a hard time following is lift with your legs; so, your quads are going to be your quads and your glutes are going to be two major muscle groups that can really help you leverage yourself and lift something, okay. So, you want to avoid lifting with biceps, your shoulders, you really want to focus on the major muscle groups, the legs, and the buttocks. So, you should really feel those powering yourself up when you're going to transfer somebody.

The second thing that you want to avoid is jeopardizing your spine, so we want to keep a nice straight spine. We don't want your spine to be flexed when we're transferring.

Another thing that we want to do is we want to keep the load nice and close to you. So, when I say nice and close, I mean, like a lot of times what we do during these transfer trainings is I give somebody five pounds, and I tell them to hold it out here and I say how long do you think you could hold five pounds out here and usually it's a matter of a couple of minutes before someone would fatigue. Now I say now bend your elbow and hold the load nice and close to you how long do you think you could hold this, and the answer is usually man, I could probably hold this for hours; it's five pounds here and it's five pounds here, but all you've done is created the leverage for yourself. Now, you've leveraged your positioning, you've leveraged the load in a way that you could support it and that's exactly what we're going to do when we're transferring somebody. We don't want to be transferring all of their weight, and we certainly don't want to be transferring all their way out here because then we really talk about those compressive forces on your spine, you know, if we're really jeopardizing the spine not lifting with our legs and we're taking some body weight way out here and trying to scoot them over to here, it's just a matter of time before you hurt your spine so if you follow these principles it'll be a lot less likely to hurt your spine when you're transferring somebody, so let's get started.

So, the first thing that I want you guys to do is position the wheelchair in a place that it's going to be ideal to transfer. Now, when we're positioning the wheelchair, I generally like to get the wheelchair at a 45-degree angle to the place that I'm that I'm transferring; so, I really want this wheelchair to be at an optimal location to where we have to do less transferring.

All right, so, I've also locked both of the brakes and then a lot of arms on wheelchairs will go back and the reason that we want to create as a little bit of a problem to be able to get over here as possible, so I don't want to be lifting over top of these arms, I really want to have these arms in a location that they're out of the way and I'm doing as little lifting as possible; okay, so I'm just clearing the mat table I don't want to have to you know pick her all the way up I just want clear enough to be able to get her over to the mat table.

All right, so, first I'm going to take the armrest off now. This one has a button that you're going to push in, and then it'll pull straight up. Some of them fold back, some of them come straight off, and an unfortunate amount of them will not come off at all, in which case you're really having to transfer over top of it.

So, the next thing that we're going to be doing is I'm going to try to scoot Christy a little bit forward so I have her in a more ideal location to where I can transfer over — so this one has really large wheels, I don't want to transfer her all the way over those wheels so I'm going to scoot her buttocks forward so that I'm only having to clear the bottom part of this wheelchair. So, what I'm going to do is I'm just going to take her leg straight up, and I'm going to scoot her forward and now I'm going to put her legs back on the ground and lock them in between my legs so her legs can't go through the other side.

So, now, I'm taking Christy far forward and I like to be able to see where I'm transferring so I have my head on her left side that gives me the ability to see where we're going to be going. So now I'm going to get nice and close, and the first thing that I want to do is check my spine, I don't want to round spine, I want a straight spine, and I'm going to be pivoting on my right heel and my left toes. The second thing that I'm going to do is I'm going to get her really far forward this is going to take all of her weight and put them through her feet and get it distributed closer to me. So, we're going to go on three, and we're going to pivot at the feet and I'm going to be lifting with my legs, one, two, three and then back over.

Now, you can actually still see my weights still with my left toes and my right heel. now the way that I was able to do that transfer did not put any pressure on my spine and it kept Christie nice and safe, and that's how we want to make sure that we're transferring patients or loved ones.

So, the other thing is when we're going back to the wheelchair, I always make sure I have one arm secure, so that we kind of have a stop point, and I want to decrease the amount of space that I have to transfer back. Another good thing is when you're transferring somebody, make sure that the feet aren't going to be in the way when we're coming over. So, right now if I were to take Christy and transfer her, you could imagine her feet trying to follow and the amount of pressure that that would take onto the knees, so another good practice is to just turn the feet a little bit lot before you transfer. So, even that right there is going to create a nice easy way for her feet to be able to transfer, slide over.

All right, so, now we're going to be transferring Christy back to the wheelchair, and I'm going to go over just a few pointers to look out for that would be different. Typically, when you're transferring to something that's lower than a wheelchair, it's going to be a lot easier, but when you're going back to a wheelchair that might be higher than the surface you were just at, you really have to make sure that we're getting a little bit more a little bit higher so you're needing to do a little bit more work to get back to the wheelchair. So, I'm doing the same things, I'm making sure that the wheelchair is nice and close to the mat table so that we're having to do less work to transfer over, unlocking the brakes, then I'm going to kind of go through the same steps, I mean, she's in a point right now where she's nice and close to the edge of the mat table, we can safely get over to this wheelchair, and I'm just going to run through all the same points; I'm keeping my back straight, I'm not using my shoulders to lift, but I'm really just securing her, then using my feet to lift, my thighs and my glutes. Then we're going to pivot over, not rotate over, so we're not rotating and extending our spine because those are the ways that we get those bulging and herniated discs along with pulled muscles, so we really want to watch out for our posture when we're when we're transferring back.

So, we're going to do the same thing. I got her knees locked in between my knees, I got a nice straight back, I'm bent at the knees, and I got her nice and close to me, and again I'm looking at where I'm transferring to. So, we're going to come far forward, I'm getting all of her weight onto her feet, I could hold this for a pretty long time. I got all of her weight right now and it's just going straight to her feet, and then we can nice and slowly pivot over and then go back from here. I'm holding her on putting the arm down and now we've got a nice, good transfer back to the thing (wheelchair).

So, if you guys have any questions, please shoot me an email. If you have any questions, my email is Justin@theafitrehab.com. Feel free to call with any questions – and hopefully you guys have learned something.

Thank you!