Mobility 4.7: Wheelchair to Car

Transferring or moving a loved one from the wheelchair to the car can be a challenge for caregivers. How do we do this? What is the safest way to do so? This task may seem daunting but following a few key steps makes it relatively simple. This simple video helps answer these questions and provides basic steps on how to move someone from the wheelchair to a car and from a car to the wheelchair.

Taking a wheelchair-bound loved one outside of the home may first require the caregiver to get them into a car. Before starting the transfer, it is important to remember a few key things: First, be prepared by gathering any items you need before you start. Have your keys, gait belt and any other items handy before you go outside. Move the car to a location that would allow easy access for the wheelchair. Protecting your back from injury should be part of every transfer; good body mechanics involves bending your knees during the transfer and maintaining natural curve in your back. There are many different types of wheelchairs available, with many different features; some chairs have footrests that flip up, some have leg rests that can swing out of the way. Getting the wheelchair ready and in the right position will make the process go smoother.

Wheel your family member from the house to the location of the car before starting the transfer. Open the door, place the wheelchair at an angle, and as close to the car as possible. You should lock the brakes for safety, this will stop the wheelchair from rolling away when your loved one stands up. Have the individual lean forward and apply a gait belt or other belt. The use of a gait belt provides increased safety by allowing you to hold onto the belt rather than an arm which may cause injury to the individual. The belt should be applied around the waist, below the ribcage, and above the hips. Getting in and out of the car may mean working in a tight space. To give yourself more room to perform the transfer, swing the leg rests out of the way. Moving the car seat back as far as possible will also give you more room to get the individual into the car.

Next, to assist the person to move to the edge of the chair and lean forward. Leaning forward shifts the person's weight forward over their feet and will make it easier for them to stand and transfer. To prevent you or the individual from being injured, you should avoid having them hold on to you. Instead, you should have them place their hands on the armrests of the wheelchair and push up. get a good grip on the gait belt and help them to stand. If your loved one’s legs are not strong, you can block their knees with your knees while they stand up guide the person to pivot and turn with small steps and back up to the car seat instruct your family member to bend their knees and slowly sit in the car seat. You should remind them to bend their head forward to avoid hitting their head on the frame of the car. To complete the transfer, help the person turn and assist in lifting their legs into the car. Finally, apply the seat belt and close the door.

Getting out of the car is the reverse process. You should position and angle the wheelchair as close to the car as possible. Lock the brakes to prevent the wheelchair from moving, and swing the leg rests out of the way to give you more room to work. Next, unsnap the seat belt, assist your loved one to turn their body. Lift their legs out of the car and scoot to the edge of the seat. Get a good grip on the gait belt and help the person to stand. If your loved one’s legs are not strong, you can block their knees with your knees while they stand up. Guide the person to pivot and turn with small steps, have them reach back for the armrest and sit in the chair when they feel the back of the chair. When your family member is comfortably seated in the chair, place the footrest back in the original position, unlock the brakes and you are ready to go to your destination.

We recognize that this is not a simple task, and you may need to watch the video more than once. This video provides the basic guidelines for transferring an individual in and out of a car. Everyone is different and may have different requirements or need specific precautions based on their medical condition or diagnosis. This video shows how to work with someone who may be able to assist during the transfer these are general steps that maybe taken.

Your loved one may need a more individualized evaluation to determine the safest method of transfer and any other equipment. In either case, we encourage you to seek professional information by contacting your physician or other licensed healthcare professionals for specific guidance on your individual situation.