

Basic Care: Transferring and Moving a Patient

What is happening

As illness progresses, patients often become weaker and may need help:

- Changing position in bed
- Rolling from side to side
- Repositioning for comfort
- Preventing skin breakdown

Safe movement is important for:

- Comfort
- Skin protection
- Breathing
- Preventing injury to both the patient and caregiver

Before moving the patient

Prepare the environment

- Wash your hands and use gloves if needed
- Explain what you are about to do slowly and calmly
- Raise or lower the bed to a comfortable working height if possible
- Make sure the area around the bed is clear and safe

Assess comfort and safety

Before moving:

- Check whether pain medication may be needed
- Make sure oxygen tubing, catheters, or other medical equipment are secure
- Ask the patient to help if they are able

Even small participation can improve comfort and safety.

General principles for moving

Move slowly and gently

- Avoid sudden pulling or twisting
- Keep the body aligned when possible
- Support both the shoulders and legs during movement

Use support devices if available

A draw sheet or transfer sheet under the patient can make repositioning:

- Easier
- Safer
- More comfortable

Protect yourself

Avoid straining your back:

- Bend at the knees rather than the waist
- Move carefully and ask for help if needed

Turning a patient onto their side

Step 1 — Prepare

- Lower the bed rail on the side where you are standing if safe to do so
- Move the patient gently toward you using the draw sheet if needed

Step 2 — Support the body

- Place one hand near the shoulders
- Place the other near the knees or hips

Keep the body aligned during movement.

Step 3 — Roll gently

- Slowly roll the patient onto their side
- Reposition pillows behind the back or between the knees as needed for comfort and support

Repositioning and comfort

After moving:

- Check comfort and breathing
- Adjust pillows and blankets
- Make sure tubing and equipment remain secure

Regular repositioning may help:

- Reduce pain
- Prevent pressure ulcers (bedsores)
- Improve comfort and breathing

Important reminder

If:

- The patient appears uncomfortable
- The movement feels unsafe
- You feel unable to move them safely

Stop and ask the hospice team for guidance.

When to call hospice

- Moving or repositioning becomes too difficult
- Significant pain occurs during movement
- New skin redness or sores appear
- Breathing worsens after repositioning
- You are concerned about safety for yourself or the patient
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