

Staying Active: Mobility and Fall Prevention



Introduction

Providing care to a person who needs support to stay active can be challenging on the body and the mind.

You may have questions about how to help someone with staying active:

- People use the term, “mobility” to explain activity. What is mobility?
- What are the different levels of mobility?
- How do you encourage a person to be active and set activity goals?
- What strategies can you apply to stay active each day?
- How do you support safe mobility and prevent falls?
- What do you do if someone falls?
- Are there supports in the community that help a senior stay active?

Facts about Mobility

Did you know?

- Immobility can increase a person’s dependence on their caregiver, cause disability, and increase their risk of falling.
- Lying in bed all day can lead to muscle loss, weakness, and decreased independence in just a few days.
- Even participating in small amounts of activity is known to help improve:
 - Skin health
 - Mood
 - Appetite
 - Heart and lung function
 - Strength
 - Healing
 - Pain management
 - Infection prevention
 - Sleep

Staying active is one of the best ways to ensure a person can continue their routine activities and be independent.

This chapter may help you answer some of these questions. By applying, and adapting the strategies in this chapter, you can help the person you care for stay active.

Mobility is typically defined as the ability to move your body. **Mobilization** is the act of moving your body to the best of your ability. People of all mobility levels can stay active as long as they keep moving to the best of their ability.

The information in this chapter is not intended to replace the advice of a health care professional. Please consult a health care professional for advice about a specific medical condition. Look for our helpful tips to communicate with health care professionals.

Recognize Different Levels of Mobility

How do I recognize a person’s level of mobility?

There are three different levels of mobility to describe a person’s abilities. Consider their day-to-day activity. The following table can help you match a person’s abilities to the different levels of mobility:¹⁰

Cannot stand to transfer from bed	Can stand to transfer from bed to chair only	Walking
The person is not able to stand up to transfer to a chair. This person is dependent on a caregiver to use a mechanical lift to get up.	The person is able to stand up and transfer from the bed to a chair, with or without some support. This person cannot walk short distances.	The person can walk short distances at a minimum with or without a walking aid (e.g. a walker or cane).

¹⁰ Adapted from the Simplified Mobility Assessment Algorithm. Liu et al. (2015). *The MOVE program*. Retrieved from: <http://www.movescanada.ca>; and RGP of Toronto. (2018). *SF7 toolkit*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rgptoronto.ca/resources/>



Encourage Activity and Set Goals

How do I encourage a person to set activity goals?

In order to help someone set activity goals that are realistic, goals should match the person’s level of mobility to conserve their energy. Work with the person you are caring for in order to understand their goals and their tolerance for activity. It is also important that the person enjoys the activity or they will not continue with it.

Consider the following tips when trying to help a person set activity goals:¹⁰

Cannot stand to transfer from bed	Can stand to transfer from bed to chair only	Walking
<p>Goal: Aim to use a mechanical lift to get the person from the bed to a chair or wheelchair three times a day and help reposition the person in bed every two hours.</p>	<p>Goal: Aim to transfer to a chair or wheelchair at least three times each day and for every meal.</p>	<p>Goal: Aim to walk a comfortable distance at least three times a day.</p>

What are some additional tips to setting activity goals?

- Start wherever they are!
- Speak to a health care professional for personalized recommendations to follow depending on the person’s health.
- If the person you care for walks on their own, aim for a minimum of 2.5 hours of activity each week:
- Get the person to choose an activity that they enjoy that makes them sweat a little, breathe a little harder and raises their heart rate.
- Reaching a total of 2.5 hours does not have to happen all at once! Try for 10 minutes at a time to get to that total.
- If the person is limited in their movements, speak with them about what they can do and what they like to do to stay active. Aim for them to participate in the chosen activity at least twice each week.
- By encouraging a person to add these activities into their calendar, it may make it easier to set remember to set goals and achieve them.
- Help the person to stay motivated by offering encouraging feedback, using positive reinforcement, and celebrating the effort made!

¹⁰ Adapted from the Simplified Mobility Assessment Algorithm. Liu et al. (2015). *The MOVE program*. Retrieved from: <http://www.movescanada.ca>; and RGP of Toronto. (2018). *SF7 toolkit*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rgptoronto.ca/resources/>

Strategies to Add Activity into Someone’s Day

What are some ideas to add activity into each day?

There are many activities to try that will match a person’s level of mobility. No matter the activity, encourage the person to be as independent as their abilities will allow. Consider the following table when trying to think of fun activities to try with the person you are caring for:¹¹

Cannot stand to transfer from bed	Can stand to transfer from bed to chair only	Walking
<p>Activities to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat meals sitting at the side of the bed or in a chair. • Participate in bed exercises. • Take part in personal care to best ability. 	<p>Activities to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a wheelchair that the person can move around in by themselves. • Participate in chair exercises. • Participate in sit to stand exercises. • Get up to a chair each meal. 	<p>Activities to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk to the store. • Walk to the mailbox. • Get off the bus one stop early. • Park the car farther away from the store. • Participate in hobbies (golf, swimming, dancing, and hiking). • Take the stairs. • Walk the halls of your home or apartment.

11 Adapted from the Simplified Mobility Assessment Algorithm. Liu et al. (2015). *The MOVE program*. Retrieved from: <http://www.movescanada.ca>; and RGP of Toronto. (2018). *SF7 toolkit*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rgptoronto.ca/resources/>



A Myth about Staying Active

X *The safest way to prevent falls is to stop getting up and to restrict movement.*

A commonly held misbelief is that to prevent falls, a person should stop getting up. This can be hazardous to a person's health and cause even more falls. Staying inactive for long periods of time can cause a person to lose muscle and strength quickly. The safest way to prevent falls is to stay as active as possible and to continue to participate in activities.

Did you know?

A fear of falling is a cause for concern. Fear prevents people from getting up and doing their regular, daily activities and can cause a person to decrease the amount of times they get up and move. Fear that causes this type of immobility can lead to the breakdown of muscles and decrease a person's independence very quickly. If the person you care for avoids getting up and moving as a result of a fear of falling, speak to a health care professional about this and get a plan in place to add more activity into each day.

Supporting Safe Mobility and Preventing Falls

Approximately half of the falls that lead to hospitalization result from falls in the home. Staying physically active is one of the best ways to prevent a fall. A fall is defined as a descent from a high position to a lower position, that a person has no control of.

There are many causes of falls, but two of the most common causes are:

1. slips and trips.
2. medication side effects.

Tripping can be the result of objects in the way, objects that are loose, or water on the floor, for example. Many slips and trips result from a loss of balance linked with a person's health condition.

How do you support a person to move and walk safely?

Consider the following ideas to support safe mobility:

- Ensure the person wears proper fitting shoes or other non-slip footwear.
- Use handrails on one or both sides of the stairs.
- Ensure there is a clear path through the rooms and halls of the house.
- Remove loose rugs, they are a common trip hazard.
- Tuck electronic cords out of the way.
- Depending on the person's level of mobility, consider having the person get dressed while sitting in a chair, or use a walker for times when the person has to stand for a long period.
- Have equipment installed in the bathroom (e.g. grab bars, raised toilet seat, or shower chair).
- Recognize if medications make the person feel tired or dizzy. Do not ask too much of a person if they have just taken this type medication.
- Encourage the person to move to the best of their ability and to do what their health conditions will safely allow.
- Depending on the person's level of mobility, use safe transfer techniques for sitting to standing. Ask a health professional to demonstrate these techniques.

How do I transfer a person safely from sitting to standing?

1. Talk to the older adult: tell them what your plan is.
2. Be encouraging: this helps the person keep their confidence.
3. Get agreement from the older adult: consider if it is the right time or if you will need to try coming back to it later.
4. Use proper body posture: bend your knees, lift with your legs. Position yourself close to the person.
5. Lift from the side: remember not to pull the person up from the front (pulling the arms or hands can cause injury) and avoid lifting from behind.
6. Go slow: after standing, pause to allow the body to catch up with the movement.
7. Consider using equipment: keep walking aids and transfer belts close by.
8. Get help if you think you need it!

(See Tool 3.1: Sit to Stand Transfer Video.)



What Should You do if the Person You Care for has Fallen?

Stay calm.

It can be a very scary event when caregivers witness a person fall. It is hard to resist trying to pull the person up right away, but this could cause more injury so try and stay calm and make the person as comfortable as possible as you get help.

Assess the situation.

If the person you care for can get up, bring a chair close to them so that they can get into a kneeling position. Gently help them grab the sides of the chair, and help guide the person up to sit on the chair by supporting each side of the person's waist. Do not put yourself in harm's way to do this. If you cannot help the person by yourself, get help from someone else!

Call for help.

If the person you care for has fallen and cannot get up or is obviously injured, call 9-1-1. If the person is complaining of any of the following after a fall has occurred, consider seeing a doctor as soon as possible:

- Obvious signs that the person has hit their head.
- Bleeding that will not stop.
- Vomiting.
- Complaints of dizziness, or feeling drowsy.
- Headache.
- Problems with vision.

Helpful Tips to Communicate with Health Care Professionals

It can be hard for caregivers to know how to speak to a health care professional about mobility. It's important to be prepared to speak with a professional so that they can offer you the right help at the right time.

The following are some helpful tips on how to communicate with health care professionals:

Offer detail.

- The more detail you can provide about a change in a person's movement and ability to walk, the more a health care professional can work out different strategies.
- Offer details such as when the change in mobility started; for how long; how much difficulty do they have; and what you have tried so far.
- If a fall has occurred, provide as many details as possible. What did the fall look like? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Has this happened before? Is there something that caused the fall?
- Tell a health professional about near falls or loss of balance. This might help your health professional look for issues that can be addressed early to prevent a future fall.
- Beyond explaining who you are and the relationship you have with the person, offer details about your caregiving role and the support you provide.

Three Key Mobility Tips

1. Encourage movement to the best of the person's ability.
2. Start wherever they are.
3. Add enjoyable activities that match the person's mobility level.

Ask questions.

- Is there a cause for a change in mobility?
- Health care professionals may want to figure out why someone may have changed, especially if this change is something that has come on quickly. They may review medications, ask about daily routine and habits, and may consider doing blood tests to understand more.
- What support does the community have to offer?
- Health care professionals should know about geriatric teams, movement specialists, and community programs that support safe mobility, exercise and fall prevention in your area. They will be able to tell you and the person you care for about these services and if they think a referral is needed. For more information, see the section below: [Finding Additional Support](#).



Finding Additional Support

How do you find additional support for mobility?

Ask a health care professional.

- Ask a qualified professional who can lead you in the right direction.

Look online.

- You can search for community supports that help a person stay active by going online and browsing the Healthline, health services for Ontario website. To access the Healthline website: www.thehealthline.ca/.
- You can also search for social and fun activities on the Government of Ontario website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/seniors-connect-your-community>.
- You may be able to find an exercise and fall prevention class in your community. Visit: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/exercise-and-falls-prevention-programs>.

Read.

- For more in depth information on safe mobility and fall prevention, browse through the **Canadian Physical Activity Toolkit for Older Adults**: <http://seniorsnl.ca/app/uploads/2018/05/Older-Adult-Physical-Activity-Toolkit.pdf>.
- Watch a video: To watch a fun and interesting short video about the importance of staying active, watch “23 and ½ Hours”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUalnS6HIGo>.

Summary

You have reviewed how to set activity goals that match a person’s mobility level. You have also reviewed some strategies to add activity into each day. Now, you can develop your own mobility strategies to support the person you care for, and find the supports you need.

Tool 3.1 Sit to Stand Transfer Video

Here is an example of a guided video to teach a caregiver to help a person move from sitting to standing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjfSwEQoe2c>.





References

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