



PATIENT LIFTING & MOVING BEST PRACTICES

The emergency medical system starts when someone calls 9-1-1. The dispatch center will take the call and determine the type of response required. For medical issues, an ambulance will be dispatched, and, in many systems, local fire and/or police departments will be called to assist. Many EMTs, police officers, and firefighters are injured each year while lifting and moving patients.

When and how to move a patient is determined by many factors. Generally, a patient should be moved immediately (emergency move) only when there is an imminent life hazard to the patient or rescuer. First responders must do what is necessary for the welfare of everyone. When there is no imminent threat to life, a well-thought-out plan for safety lifting and transporting the patient should be established before moving.

Have a Plan for Patient Lifts

Patient lifting and moving are critical skills ranging from a simple procedure to a complex operation. First responders must move the patient, protect them from further injury, and protect themselves. While lifting and moving skills can be developed and improved through practice, some patient moves require quick thinking and ingenuity. All responders must be on the same page when performing a patient lift. Pre-lift considerations include:

- The weight of the patient, availability, and timeliness of help; use a rough guideline of 1 rescuer per 75 - 100 pounds of patient weight (plus equipment), depending on accessibility and handholds. Know your physical ability and limitations.
- Communicate the plan clearly and frequently with other rescuers. One person must take the lead.
- What equipment should be used? What types of lifting equipment are available?
- What is the response time for the nearest bariatric BLS unit?
- Can the patient be lifted safely from their current location, or should the crew use proper techniques to drag them to a better place before attempting the lift?
- Where is the patient going to be taken once lifted? Which doorway is easiest? Should a window be made into a door? Is the pathway clear?
- How will crew members move a patient sitting in a vehicle to the ambulance?
- What if the initial plan does not work? What is Plan B?

Prepare for Patient Lifts

Soft tissue injuries from repetitive and heavy lifting are common causes of injury to EMTs, police officers, and firefighters. Department heads can use the following steps to prepare their personnel.

- Train and retrain on safe lifting techniques. Photograph or videotape patient handling drills to study body mechanics.
- Use situational drills and tabletop exercises to practice decision-making for patient handling.
- Evaluate lifting aids such as power stretchers, stair chairs, mega movers, etc.
- Debrief with the crew after every significant patient-handling incident.

Body Mechanics for Patient Lifts

Proper body mechanics is the best way to use your body to move or lift a patient. Concentrate on protecting your back by keeping it straight and using the more powerful muscles in your legs to do the work. When lifting a patient, remember the [W-S-L principles](#) (Wide stance – Set lower back – Drive the weight using the legs):

- Begin your lift by facing the patient.
- Get the widest stance practical for maximum stability during the lift. Ensure good footing. Consider surface conditions and obstacles to a proper lifting stance.
- If the patient is on the ground, lower your body by bending your knees and squatting down to the patient or backboard. Set, or lock your lower back in its natural curvature.
- Keep the weight of the patient as close to your body as possible.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.
- Plan your lift by positioning yourself to minimize twisting during the lift. If you must twist your body during the lift, can you make two moves to reposition to eliminate the twisting motion?

Wellness

Patient handling can be a physically taxing skill requiring a high fitness level. First Responders need to follow a well-rounded program of weight training, cardiovascular exercise, and stretching to ensure personal readiness for the demands of the job.

For good reasons, physical training and stretching have become routine for many public safety agencies. Studies show that a department-wide fitness and wellness program and training on proper body mechanics and lifting techniques result in fewer injuries. Responders must commit to a personal program of exercise and stretching to withstand the job's physical demands to ensure an exciting and fulfilling injury-free career.