

TRANSFER BELTS

In the 1990s, **WorkSafeNB** developed the **Back in Form (BIF) Lift and Transfer Program**.^{*} This program was created in response to the high incidence of musculoskeletal injuries that stemmed from issues surrounding client handling in the health care sector.

The **BIF** program is unique, in that it allows caregivers to gain an in-depth understanding of posture and body mechanics. This knowledge provides them with the physical skills required to reprogram their bodies and integrate efficient weight shifts and counterbalance movements into their daily work practices.

Often referred to as a walking or gait belt, a transfer belt is an assistive device designed to help with proper client transfer. Many caregivers do not recognize the importance of using transfer belts. These are often the same people who are at greatest risk for injury. Studies have shown that the use of these belts helps to reduce the stress on the lower back.

**Note: This publication is a component of the overall BIF Lift and Transfer Program. Before using a transfer belt, it is important to ensure that you have received body mechanics training and proper instruction on the use of the belt.*



Two studies published by the University of Wisconsin advocate the use of transfer belts when moving clients. The first study stated that compression forces to the L5/S1 spinal disc were significantly reduced when caregivers used transfer belts. The second study suggested that the pulling forces required to move clients without the use of transfer belts exceeded acceptable limits for females. However, when transfer belts were used, the pulling forces required to move clients were well within acceptable limits.

HOW TO ... PLACE THE TRANSFER BELT ON THE CLIENT

Many people place a transfer belt on a client incorrectly (by putting it around the client's waist). Not only can this cause the client discomfort, but it can also decrease the efficiency and effectiveness of the transfer.

A transfer belt, when used properly, should fasten snugly around the client's lower abdomen-hip area, as close as possible to their centre of gravity.

HOW TO ... GRIP THE TRANSFER BELT

Caregivers should place their hands through the handholds with their palms facing the client's hip. The thumbs should curl over and grip the top of the handholds, while the fingers curl underneath, gripping the bottom of the belt. This allows for a very secure grip and the ability to release the handhold quickly, if necessary.

HOW TO ... CHOOSE A TRANSFER BELT

There are various types of transfer belts. Your Back in Form (BIF) co-ordinator should consider the following when choosing the belt:

- 1 The belt should be broad enough to provide excellent support while allowing the client to feel comfortable and secure.
- 2 The belt should be adjustable and available in a number of different sizes (small, medium, large).
- 3 The belt should have buckles that do not slip from their set position.
- 4 The belt should have multiple handholds, allowing the caregiver to safely position their body close to the client.
- 5 The stitching in the seams, attachments, and handholds should be able to withstand excessive forces.
- 6 The belt should be made of slip-resistant fabric.
- 7 The belt should contain padding to ensure comfort for the client.
- 8 The fabric and stitching should be made of rot-proof material.
- 9 The fabric should be able to withstand multiple washings.

DUE DILIGENCE AND TRANSFER BELTS

Employers, supervisors and employees all have a role to play in preventing musculoskeletal injuries. Legally, employers and employees have to comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act*. Paragraph 9(1)(a) requires all employers and supervisors to take every reasonable precaution to ensure the health and safety of the employee; paragraph 12(b) requires that employees conduct themselves to ensure their own health and safety and the health and safety of other employees and persons at, in or near the place of employment. Other sections may also apply, depending on the specific circumstances. Below are some guidelines to follow.

Employer

- Have a written policy and procedure related to the use of transfer belts, and take steps to verify the employee can comply with them.
- Supply a transfer belt for each employee on duty.
- Provide employees and supervisors with training on body mechanics and the proper use of transfer belts.
- Ensure transfer belts are being used when necessary.

Supervisor

- Enforce the company's written policy on the use of transfer belts.
- Ensure that you and your employees attend training on

body mechanics and receive instruction on the proper use of transfer belts.

- Ensure the belts are supplied, maintained in good condition, and meet the standards as outlined in the "how to choose a transfer belt" section.
- Ensure employees carry a transfer belt around their waists while on duty.

Employee

- Ensure you use transfer belts on all clients who have been assessed as requiring:
 - A one- or two-person pivot transfer (with or without force).
 - A walk (with or without force).
 - A transfer board (with force).
- Ensure you carry a transfer belt around your own waist while on duty.
- Report deficiencies and lack of availability of transfer belts to your supervisor.
- Ensure you attend training on body mechanics and that you receive instruction on the proper use of transfer belts.

REMEMBER

Once an appropriate transfer belt is selected, the caregiver should receive training on its use and on the principles of safe body mechanics.

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