

Proper Body Mechanics and Back Safety Key Points and Definitions

1. Caregiving activities may place stress on your body, resulting in injury to the back, shoulders or neck.
2. Posture refers to the way we hold the position of our body while standing, sitting or lying down. Proper posture is the correct alignment of the body. Proper posture maintains the natural curve of the spine, helping to conserve energy and prevent muscle strain.
3. When standing, proper posture includes having your head up with your chin in. Your shoulders are back and relaxed. Your chest is up with your abdomen pulled in and up. Your arms are at your sides. Buttocks are slightly tucked in and knees are unlocked. Your feet are flat on the floor and parallel, about 12 inches apart. Your weight is slightly forward.
4. Body mechanics refers to the way we move when we perform activities. You can reduce the risk of injury to your back when you apply the principles of body mechanics, which allow you to maintain proper posture during movement.
5. These general guidelines will make your job easier and safeguard your health:
 - Wear comfortable shoes with non-skid soles.
 - Know your limits. For loads that are too heavy to handle alone, ask someone to help you rather than risking injury by attempting it alone.
 - Be aware of the maximum amount of weight you can lift or move safely.
 - Before lifting someone, make sure you tell the person what you are planning to do to avoid surprise or sudden movements. Determine how much the person can help you before you begin to lift.
 - Lift first in your mind, then with your body.
 - Be aware of your body's position and posture before you begin to lift.
 - Avoid reaching for or lifting anything above the head. Get on the same level as the object, or use a reacher.
 - Slide, roll or push the object whenever you can instead of lifting.
6. The following principles of body mechanics are important when lifting:
 - Create a strong base of support by widening your stance so that your feet are shoulder-width apart. Feet can be parallel or one foot in front of the other, depending upon the physical space you are working in.

- Get as close as possible to the object or person without leaning forward.
 - Keep your center of gravity low.
 - Squat down by bending at the knees and hips, keeping your back straight. Avoid stooping over at the waist.
 - Before lifting, tighten your stomach and buttocks muscles.
 - Lift by using the strong muscles of your thighs to come up to standing.
 - Always lift in a smooth motion to prevent injury.
 - Never twist at the waist when moving an object or person. Instead, take small steps and turn your entire body in the direction you want to face.
 - You can also pivot toward a new direction. Keeping the object close to your body, place one foot ahead of the other. Turn both feet at the same time, pivoting on the heel of one foot and the toe of the other foot.
7. Rushing or hurrying during caregiving activities increases the risk of injuring yourself or your client. It's important to pay attention and to use the principles of body mechanics no matter what task you are performing.
8. Moving correctly, using the proper muscles when lifting and understanding how to use the principles of body mechanics makes your job easier, reducing fatigue and muscle strain.