

Body Mechanics

Practicing proper body mechanics helps to prevent injury, improve breathing, and conserve energy.

Body mechanics refers to the way we move during daily activities and is based on good posture. Some of the benefits of using proper body mechanics include:

1. Helps to maintain good balance
2. Keeps movement of diaphragm unrestricted
3. Keeps breathing under control by coordinating breathing with movements
4. Minimizes unnecessary or unsafe positions/movements

Be mindful of these 4 B's to help improve your body mechanics:

Base, Back, Big Muscles and Breathing

Base: Your base of support is the points of contact that your body or assistive device makes with a surface. A good base of support provides stability and allows the body to move effectively and safely.

Examples:

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart
- Sit/sleep on firm, supportive surfaces
- Choose appropriate chair heights, with feet resting on floor or footrest
- Use support when standing or walking (e.g. cane, rollator)

Back: Good posture means that the natural curves of the spine are well supported and aligned with other body parts. It helps to reduce muscle strain, risk of injury and allows the diaphragm to move freely.

Ways to improve posture:

- Avoid slouching
- Support lumbar curve (in the lower back) while sitting
- Use pillows to maintain good body alignment while sleeping
- Take breaks and change positions frequently
- Minimize bending and twisting:
 - Use long-handled tools (reacher, long-handled shoe horn)
 - Reorganize storage to a comfortable height
 - Sitting on stool/chair during household activities

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Big Muscles: Using larger, stronger muscles helps to prevent the smaller muscles or joints from being injured. It also conserves energy to reduce fatigue and shortness of breath.

Think about using your legs instead of your back and your shoulder and upper arms instead of your lower arms and wrists.

Examples:

- Hold objects close to the body
- Lift by slowly straightening your legs while keeping your back straight
- Squat down by bending the knees instead of bending forward to reach something low

Breathing: Using breathing techniques promotes efficient coordination of breathing and movement as well as encourages rest and relaxation.

Examples:

- Exhale during movement (e.g. exhale while rising out of a chair)
- Pacing (take rest breaks and breath in between movements)
- Don't hold your breath

Important notes:

- Be aware of your limits and do not push beyond your abilities.
- Carry smaller loads and take breaks as needed.
- Plan ahead — know what, where, and how you will be moving the object.
- Don't remain in one position for a long time—stretch or change positions frequently.
- Break up movements into smaller steps to allow rest breaks and to prevent injuries and fatigue.