

Transferring to and from Your Wheelchair

When using a wheelchair, transferring from one surface to another is an important skill. At first, you might need to use a transfer board or help from an assistant. Always practice transfers with your therapist before trying them alone.

Getting your Wheelchair into Position

1. If possible, remove or swing away the footrest on the side you are transferring. Place your feet on the floor pointing away from the direction of transfer.
2. Position the wheelchair on a small angle as close to the surface as possible.
3. Put your breaks on. If you are using a power chair, turn it off.
4. Remove the armrest and clothing guard on the side you are transferring.



Remove footrest



Position Chair



Put on brakes



Remove armrest

Transferring with a Transfer Board

A transfer board is used to bridge the gap between your chair and the target platform. It's used when first learning to do a transfer. It's also used to make transfers between longer gaps easier. When using a transfer board, always make sure that the board is firmly placed on both surfaces.

1. Get your wheelchair into position.
2. Move forward in your chair so that your bum is closer to the edge of your seat. Your bum should be in front of the back wheel.



Contact your Physiotherapist for more information.

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3. Place one side of the transfer board under your upper thigh or bum. The other side should go on the target platform.
4. Place one hand close to the middle of the transfer board. Your other hand should go on the front corner of your seat or armrest.
5. To transfer, push up with your arms to lift your bum off the seat. Move your bum toward the target platform one lift at a time. Readjust your hands' positions after every lift.
6. Once you are on the new surface, gently remove the board from under you bum.

Transferring without a Transfer Board

Transferring without a board is done with one single lift. Swing your bum directly onto the target platform.

1. Get your wheelchair into position.
2. Move forward in your chair so that your bum is on the edge of your seat. Your bum should be in front of the back wheel.
3. Place one hand on target platform and your other hand on the front corner of your seat or armrest.
4. Lean forward and turn your head away from the direction you are transferring.
5. Use your arms to lift your body and guide it towards the bed. Push up and swing your bum onto the target platform.



When learning to transfer, check your skin on your bum more often. Dragging across surfaces or rubbing your skin on your wheelchair wheel can cause skin damage.

Safety tips:

Manual chair users: Put the brakes on so chair does not move. If you have caster pin locks, put them on also. Make sure you are forward in your chair to clear the wheel when you transfer. Avoid rubbing the wheel during the transfer to protect your skin.

Power chair users: Turn the chair off in case you hit the joystick by accident.

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Transferring with Assistance

Some people need the help of one or two people when transferring. Assistants can help you lift and keep your balance during a transfer. When you transfer with assistance, you do it in the same way as you would alone. Helpers should always be careful to keep their back straight and lift with their legs. This helps prevent injury to the person helping. When working with a new assistant, give them clear instructions on how they can help. Your therapist can also help train assistants.



First Assistant Position 1: An assistant can kneel in front of you right beside the bed. They should put their hands under your thighs or bum to help you lift.

First Assistant Position 2: An assistant can stand in front of you. They should hold your knees in place with their knees. Lean forward and put your hands in position as if you were transferring alone. When you begin your transfer, they can help lift and guide your bum.

Second Assistant: If two assistant are helping you transfer, the second one can stand behind you. They should reach over your backrest and hold you under your bum. If they cannot reach under your bum, they can grab your belt or waistband.

Tip: When you and your caregiver are ready to transfer, you can say “1, 2, 3, LIFT!” The helper should lift with their legs and keep their back straight.

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Transferring with Assistance



Toilet or Commode Transfers

Transferring to a toilet or commode can be a little more difficult than to a bed. Before trying the transfer, make sure that the area is dry and that the seat is at a good height. Also, lift the commode armrest closest to you to get it out of the way.

Follow the steps used to do the other transfers. Once you are on the commode, get your bum as far back as possible. Lower the commode armrests. To slide your pants down, lean side to side, lowering them a little at a time.

Transferring is easier when you have a healthy body weight. Exercise often to stay strong and maintain a healthy weight.

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Bath Tub Transfer

When transferring to a bath bench, caution should be taken. Bathrooms have many hard surfaces which can be slippery when wet. Before trying this transfer, make sure the area in and around the bath tub is dry. It's easiest if the bath bench is set to the same the height is the same as your wheelchair. Make sure that the bath bench is secure with all four legs at the same height.

Safety Tips for Bathroom Transfers

Grab Bars: Floor or wall mounted grab bars can be useful for balance and extra support. They can be set in place or have an option to flip down. They can also be helpful to help you lean to the side and get your pants down.

Removing your pants: When on a commode or toilet, removing your pants can be difficult. Wearing loose or stretchy waistband pants can help. Consider removing your pants in bed first.

Protecting your skin: When transferring without clothes, a towel can help you slide across the transfer board. Place a gel pad or a towel over your wheelchair wheel. This helps prevent rubbing and damage to your skin. Padded commodes or bath benches can be softer on your skin.

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