

Guideline C2:

Assisting a person to walk

Remember - carers are twice as likely as people in most other professions to injure their backs through moving and handling activities. To help minimise these risks always consider the following before assisting a person to walk:

Self help	Can the activity be avoided i.e. can the person walk independently? You may be able to encourage this by ensuring that any necessary equipment is available e.g. walking stick/frame and that the route is not too strenuous for the person.
Ergonomics	Ensure there is sufficient space to walk allowing for equipment where needed. Assess any difficulties on route e.g. ramps, steps. Consider the use of rails or fixed supports. Hoists with walking slings may be used where walking ability is limited or unpredictable.
Communication	Check how the person wishes to be assisted and consult their handling plan. Encourage them to move at their own pace and remind them to look forwards not at their feet. Give clear directions.
Safety	Ensure that the person can reliably bear and maintain their own weight. If they cannot do this or if there is a history of falls the use of mechanical equipment should be considered. Ensure that the person is wearing appropriate footwear. Check ferrules on walking sticks/frames regularly for signs of wear. Plan how to deal with attachments e.g. urine bags. Ensure rest pauses or ask a second carer to follow with a wheelchair if the person is likely to tire.

Preparation

1. Assess if 1 or 2 carers are needed and if 2 who will give instructions.
2. Plan how to deal with attachments e.g. catheter bags, drip stands.
3. Plan the route, assess and deal with any difficulties e.g. obstacles.

Providing assistance

1. If 1 carer is involved, assist the person on the weaker side unless otherwise directed by suitably qualified staff (Fig: 1).
2. Stand close to the person at an oblique angle (about 45°). Use appropriate open palm holds.
3. Adjust your feet to allow space for both to walk. Follow the person's movement as closely as possible and encourage them to look forwards not down at their feet to encourage good balance.
4. Walk at a pace suitable for the individual (Fig: 1).



Fig: 1

Warning

- Check that the person can reliably bear and maintain their own weight before assisting them to walk.
- Do not assist the person's feet forward with your feet.
- Do not use drag holds that anchor you to the person.
- Do not walk with a person who may be unsteady perhaps due to the urgent need for a toilet, instead transport them there in a wheelchair and assist them to walk back



Fig: 2

