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First Responders - Safe Lifting and Moving of Patients



The emergency medical system starts when someone calls 911. The dispatch center will take the call and determine the type of response required. For medical issues, an ambulance will be dispatched and, in many systems, local fire and / or police departments will be called to assist. In the course of providing patient care, many EMT's, police officers, and firefighters are injured each year while lifting and moving patients.

When and how to move a patient is determined by many factors. In general, a patient should be moved immediately (emergency move) only when there is an imminent life hazard to the patient or rescuer. First responders must do what is necessary for the welfare of everyone. When there is no imminent threat to life, a well thought out plan for safely lifting and transporting the patient should be established prior to moving.

Have a Plan for Patient Lifts

Patient lifting and moving are critical skills that can range from a simple procedure to a complex operation. First responders must move the patient, protect the patient from further injury, and protect themselves. While lifting and moving skills can be developed and improved through practice, some patient moves require quick thinking and ingenuity. All responders must be on the same page when performing a patient lift. Pre-lift considerations include:

- The weight of the patient, availability, and timeliness of help; use a rough guideline of 1 rescuer per 75 - 100 pounds of patient weight (plus equipment), depending on accessibility and handholds. Know your own physical ability and limitations.
- Communicate the plan clearly and frequently with other rescuers. One person must take the lead.
- What equipment should be used? What types of lifting equipment are available?
- What is the response time for the nearest bariatric BLS unit?
- Can the patient be lifted safely from their current location, or should the crew use proper techniques to drag the patient to a better location before attempting the lift?
- Where is the patient going to be taken once lifted? Which doorway is easiest? Should a window be made into a door? Is the pathway clear?
- How will crew members move a patient sitting in a vehicle or on the floor / ground to the ambulance?
- What if the initial plan does not work?

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Prepare for Patient Lifts

Soft tissue injuries from repetitive and heavy lifting are common causes of injury to EMTs, police officers, and firefighters. Department heads can use the following steps to prepare their personnel.

- Train and retrain on safe lifting techniques
- Photograph or videotape patient handling drills to study body mechanics
- Use situational drills and tabletop exercises to practice decision-making for patient handling
- Evaluate lifting aids such as power stretchers, stair chairs, mega movers, etc.
- Debrief every significant patient handling incident



EMS Lifting Drill



Stryker Power Pro Cot

Body Mechanics for Patient Lifts

Proper body mechanics refers to the best way to use your body to move or lift a patient. Concentrate on protecting your back by keeping it straight and using the more powerful muscles in your legs to do the work. When lifting a patient remember the following key points:

- Begin your lift by facing the patient you intend to lift
- Have your legs at least shoulder-width apart. Lock your lower back in its natural S-curve. Keep your head up, and your shoulders square.
- Ensure good footing. Consider surface conditions and obstacles to a proper lifting stance
- If the patient is on the ground, lower your body by bending your knees and squatting down to the patient or backboard
- Grasp the equipment you are using with your hands, palms facing upward
- Keep the weight of the patient as close to your body as possible
- Lift with your legs, not your back
- Lift without twisting

Wellness

Patient handling can be a physically taxing skill that requires a high level of fitness. First Responders need to follow a well-rounded program of weight training, cardiovascular exercise and stretching to ensure personal readiness for the demands of the job. Physical training and stretching have become requirements for many public safety agencies for good reason. Studies show that a department-wide fitness and wellness program coupled with training on proper body mechanics and lifting techniques result in fewer injuries. Responders must commit to a personal program of exercise and stretching to withstand the physical demands of the job to ensure an exciting and fulfilling injury free career.