

# Mobility Issues with Seniors

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## A How-To for Caregivers

Decreased mobility is one of the many challenges of progressing in age. Decreases in mobility can also create issues for the caregiver.

As previously discussed in depth, the desire to age in place is common among older adults today. Essential to helping them achieve this goal is the ability to attend to the “activities of daily living,” otherwise known as the “ADLs.” Here’s a closer look at why the ADLs matter, along with the role that adaptive equipment can play in supporting mobility and independence in seniors.

## About the ADLs and IADLs

ADLs are activities that are considered fundamental to self-care. Seniors who maintain their ADLs have a higher level of independence. Consequently, declines in these functions are predictive of poor outcomes in hospitalization, illness and higher mortality. The desired self-care functions are:

- Dress
- Feed
- Ambulate
- Toilet
- Hygiene

An older adult who only needs help with bathing may require assistance every few days, whereas someone who has difficulty transferring might require full-time help. The loss of independence in the performance of an ADL may be a sign of a chronic illness such as dementia, depression or heart failure. The loss of continence is a predictor for placement in long-term care facilities.

In addition to the basic ADLs covered above, there is also a secondary level comprising the Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs). These include more advanced functions that are still necessary for self-care, including:

- Preparing Meals
- Shopping
- Housekeeping
- Using the Telephone
- Transporting Themselves
- Medication Management
- Managing Their Own Finances

As these are mostly essential survival functions, inability to perform IADLs only adds to the help a senior may require. In the event caregiver supports are not adequate and the patient becomes at risk, a change in living situation may ultimately be needed.

While these activities may seem simple to the young, strong and healthy, they can become increasingly difficult for older adults. In both cases, identifying changes in an individual's ability to attend to the ADLs and IADLs can help determine areas for intervention.

### **Mobility Maintenance Tips**

One of the best ways for seniors to maintain mobility in order to support their ADLs and IADLs is functional fitness training. This trains muscles to work together, preparing them for daily tasks by simulating common movements one might do at home, work or in sports. While using various muscles in the upper and lower body at the same time, functional fitness exercises also emphasize core stability.

Functional fitness training has benefits for people of all ages, but it may be especially beneficial for older adults as part of a comprehensive program to improve balance, agility and muscle strength, and reduce the risk of falls.

### **Adaptive Equipment**

A number of tools exist aimed at helping older adults manage mobility challenges that might otherwise compromise their ability to continue to live independently. These include:

- Dressing Sticks
- Reachers/Grabbers
- Long Handle Shoe Horns

- Button Hooks
- Sock Aids
- Long Handle Sponges

While there is a learning curve involved with integrating adaptive equipment into daily life, the payoffs are profound in terms of boosting both independence and confidence in older adults.

### **Transferring a Person from a Wheelchair to a Car**

Ever picked up someone from a hospital or a nursing facility only to have an aide easily glide the wheelchair over to the car door and effortlessly transfer the person into the car? It seems rather easy until you get to your destination and try to do the very same thing. Now how did they do it? Not knowing how to accomplish what appeared to be easily achieved moments earlier just adds to the stress and anxiety of a family caregiver.

### **Changing Sheets of an Occupied Bed**

While difficulties are often presented in terms of a caregiver's emotional challenges, there are plenty of physical challenges too. One task many caregivers struggle with is changing the sheets on an occupied bed.

These are the nine steps involved in changing a bed while a patient is still in it:

#### **1. Find a Partner, If Possible**

While it's possible to change an occupied bed on your own, the task is significantly easier when done by two people.

#### **2. Wash Your Hands and Wear Gloves**

For your safety and the safety of the patient, thoroughly wash your hands before beginning the process of changing the bed linens. Gloves add a second level of protection.

#### **3. Explain the Process**

The act of changing an occupied bed can be awkward for both the caregiver and the bedridden individual. In order to mitigate discomfort, take time to explain your intentions.

#### **4. Secure Your Loved One**

Gently help your loved one roll onto his/her side in order to ensure that he/she doesn't roll off the bed. (If he/she can help in this process and/or hold onto the bed rail, the job will be both quicker and easier.)

#### **5. Prepare the Sheets**

Beginning at the opposite side of the bed, remove the tucked-in side of the sheet and roll it in the direction of the person lying down. Next, take a clean sheet and roll it toward them while he/she remains in the side-lying position. Then, help them roll onto his/her other side toward the clean sheet.

#### **6. Swap Out the Soiled Sheet for the Clean Sheet**

With the person remaining on his/her side, remove the old sheet while pulling in the new one. (Four hands make this task much more manageable than two.) Pull the sheet taut to ensure that it's free of wrinkles, then secure by tucking in the edges using hospital corners.

#### **7. Change the Pillowcase**

Gently slide the pillow from the bed using your hand to help lower the person's head to the mattress. Remove the cover and replace with a clean pillowcase. Taking the same care, return the pillow underneath the person's head or back.

#### **8. Check in**

Confirm with your loved one that he/she is comfortable before covering him/her with a clean flat sheet and blanket.

#### **9. Remove Gloves and Wash Your Hands**

Remove and dispose of your gloves, then repeat the handwashing process.

This is not an easy job, but it's a necessary one – both in terms of promoting your loved one's comfort as well as promoting infection control.

By following these steps every time you change the sheets, you're not only promoting good hygiene, you're helping improve the quality of life of a bedridden person. Thankfully, the more you perform this task, the easier it becomes.