

FALL 2015

The Challenge of a 35-lb Lifting Limit

By: John Juresic, Loss Control Consultant, Thomas McGee, L.C.

One of the main challenges facing nursing homes is the frequent lifting and repositioning of residents that exceed the safe lifting capacity of caregivers. That includes KING members as well with the average total number of claims from lifting and transferring at 23% for a ten year average.

Here's a question to ponder:

*There is a resident that is partially dependent, weighs 180-pounds and is only able to lift about half of his own weight. This resident is sitting in a chair and needs help standing. **How many caregivers would it take to help him safely if they have no lift equipment?***

[Drum roll please...]



Three. A NIOSH (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) calculation sets the recommended **maximum lift per caregiver at 35 pounds.**

In short, all lifts of residents are going to exceed the maximum recommended weight limit for manual lifting. In an effort to provide some guidance, OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has developed a Safe Transfer Flow Chart that list four scenarios that caregivers will come across in their day to day activity. With each scenario there is a chart that steps the caregiver through to evaluate where the resident's physical capacity is and what precautions need to be taken. This Flow chart is located in the KING On-line Resource Library.

Another gage to consider when moving a resident is to think of the resident's leg. A leg weighs about 16% of total body weight or about 39 pounds for a 250-pound person. So, if the resident weighs 250 pounds or more, the caregiver will need to use equipment to lift the resident's leg. Caregivers need to be aware of the risk they are facing.

When caregivers assess the need for lift equipment, they need to estimate how much of the resident's weight they may be bearing. Just because there are two caregivers performing the lift doesn't mean they are sharing the load equally. Adding to the equation, if the resident is combative, the lift limit would be even lower.

In addition to the lifting task, there are also other types of Muscle Skeletal injury exposures related to pushing and pulling motions that are required to provide care in repositioning activities and lateral transfers. Now, the 35-pound limit only applies to lifting tasks. For a pushing or pulling task with the hand position at a height of about 37.5 inches above the floor the limit is about 58 pounds (Snook & Ciriello, 1991).



Some residents may be reluctant to try a new lifting device; studies have shown that the use of mechanical lifting equipment increases a resident's comfort and feeling of security when compared to manual methods (Zhuang et al., 2000; Garg and Owen 1992).

So, how can management motivate staff to use lifting equipment initially and maintain a long-term commitment?

- Have a written "No Lift" policy and procedure (KING On-line Resource Library).
- Provide significant training on lift usage and operations of the equipment – assess competency of equipment at least annually.
- Post a graph to show caregivers the decrease in injuries when lifts are being used on a regular basis.
- Do not permit manual lifting except in life-threatening circumstances.
- Include caregivers and residents in the selection of lifting equipment.
- Ensure that all shifts are covered by an adequate number of caregivers who have been trained to use the lifts to help decrease these injuries.
- Ensure that sufficient slings of the proper size are available.
- Store equipment in convenient locations.
- Select a peer safety leader(s) to provide on-going education, bedside assessments and training and re-training on lifting equipment.

The 35-pound limit is not only good for caregivers, it is good for the resident and the organization's bottom line.

Editor's Note:

The KING Safety Matters newsletter is published monthly to provide general safety information. It is not a substitute for adequate safety training, or intended to provide complete safety information or training, on any specific subject. The information contained herein is intended to assist safety efforts, and increase safety awareness.

In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:

John Juresic
Loss Control Consultant
Thomas McGee L.C.
jjuresic@thomasmcgee.com

Kevin McFarland
President
KING
kevin@leadingagekansas.org

Resources:

- National Institute for Occupation Safety and Health. Work practices guide for manual lifting. – Publication No. 81-122.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- Living – OSHA's 35-lb. lifting limit. Steve Wilder, CHSP, STS. December 9, 2013.

