

# Transferring with ALS

Transferring, or moving from place to place, becomes more difficult as you lose muscle strength. Moving between chairs, getting on and off the toilet, and moving from the bed to a walker or wheelchair can become challenging for both for the person living with ALS and the caregiver.

If you are struggling with transferring, ask the physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) at your ALS clinic or home health agency for suggestions. There are many different assistive devices and strategies that can help you move safely from place to place.



## Transferring Safety

The most important thing about transfers is making sure you and your caregiver do them safely. Preventing falls and injuries is crucial when determining which devices and techniques will work best for you. It is also important to recognize when a transfer method that used to work no longer does. If it feels like your transfers are becoming less safe, reach back out to your PT or OT to discuss which transfer devices and techniques will be best moving forward.

## Independent Transfers

If you are starting to have trouble standing up, there are assistive devices and techniques that may be able to help you continue to get up and down on your own. For starters, try raising your seat heights so that your hips are above your knees. This will give you a mechanical advantage that makes it easier to stand up while using less energy. You can try adding solid cushions or foam blocks to raise your chair heights at home, but do not stack multiple cushions as they can slide or tip. Helpful devices for independent transfers include transfer poles, swivel seat cushions, and motorized lift chair recliners.

## Assisted Transfers

If you can still use some of your own arm and leg strength and need help from a caregiver, you will need to learn how to safely transfer with assistance. There are many different types of transfers, so you will need to use different methods and devices depending on your particular situation. If you need transfer assistance, it is always helpful to use a gait belt or transfer belt. Devices that can help with assisted transfers include pivot discs, transfer boards, Beasy Boards, and motorized lift chair recliners.

Some tips for assisted transfers include limiting transfer distances, moving potential hazards out of the way, taking your time, communicating clearly, standing close to the person being transferred, widening your stance, bending at the knees, and aborting transfers that aren't going well.

Every transfer situation is different. These are general tips—not step-by-step instructions. Always consult with and get training from your physical or occupational therapist. If a caregiver feels that transfers are uncomfortable or unsafe without additional assistance, you will either need a second caregiver or a patient (Hoyer) lift.

Insurance does not usually cover transfer devices, except for manual patient (Hoyer) lifts and a portion of lift chair recliners. However, you can ask your ALS clinic or local ALS Network care manager if they have any that you can borrow. You can also visit the ALS Equipment Guide to learn more and purchase devices directly.

## Transferring with a Patient (Hoyer) Lift

If you are unable to help bear your own weight and your caregiver(s) cannot safely lift you on their own, you will need to transfer using a patient lift (commonly called a Hoyer lift). While using a sling, this very helpful device lifts and transfers you between your bed, wheelchair, recliner chair, etc.

There are both manual and electric patient lifts. Ask your medical team when you might qualify for a patient lift. Most insurances will cover the manual lift but not the electric one. If you prefer an electric lift, ask the durable medical equipment (DME) company if you can just pay the difference between the manual and electric model.

When you receive your patient lift, your neurologist should arrange for a PT or OT to come to your home to train you.

### Get Local Support



*Formerly ALS Golden West*

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