

2. Assisting People Who Have Mobility Impairments

A person's mobility can be reduced for various reasons: the use of a wheelchair, a cane, a walking aid, or an assistance dog; pregnancy; advanced age; carrying a baby or accompanying a child or children; an invisible impairment, and so forth.

1) Basic Rules

Smile and greet

This is the very first step to effective assistance: smile and greet, and show that you want to engage in a pleasant communication.

Ask questions

If you notice a person with reduced mobility who seems to be in difficulty, be proactive and ask if you can be of assistance to the person, whether he or she is accompanied or not. Remember to approach the person from the front. If it is a wheelchair user, try to make eye contact while talking.

Agree on “what” and “how” beforehand

Make sure to agree with the person you are assisting on what to do and how to help beforehand. Some wheelchair users have the experience of feeling uneasy because their assistant shouted to others around them to make way for the wheelchair.

Remember to act naturally and be considerate of the feelings of those you assist.

2) Assisting a wheelchair user

How to close a manual folding wheelchair:

1. Lift the footrest.
2. Grab the seat at the front and the back.
3. Lift the seat slowly, and completely until the wheels come together.

How to open a manual folding wheelchair:

1. Grab the seat at the front and the back.
2. Press the seat center down slowly.
3. Press the seat down all the way. Be sure not to get your fingers caught in the seat while opening it.

There are also wheelchairs that are closed and opened differently and those that cannot be folded. Ask wheelchair users or their companion for instruction on how to use their wheelchair before providing assistance.

Check before assisting a wheelchair user

Before starting to push a wheelchair, check the posture of the person in the wheelchair. A wheelchair user not correctly seated may slip off while on a slope or ramp. Also keep in mind that the wheelchair user can become tired or feel pain in the

seat by remaining seated in the same posture for a long time.

Assisting a manual wheelchair user

- ① Stand behind the wheelchair, and grab the push handles. Keep your feet open, left to right or one foot forward and the other back, to lower the center of gravity of your body.
- ② Push the wheelchair, applying the weight of your body. Remember to verbally signal what you are about to do before making a move (for example, “We’re now moving forward”).
- ③ Move slowly, paying attention to the surroundings. When turning a corner, be sure to look ahead carefully, and turn slowly. In a crowded place, pay attention so as not to let the footrest touch someone walking in front of the wheelchair user.
- ④ Remember to verbally signal to the wheelchair user before making any new move, such as stopping and turning.

Locking the brakes of a manual wheelchair

- ① First, approach and provide assistance with letting person know “ I will apply breaks” or necessary assistance.
- ② Brakes (stoppers) must be locked on both sides. Remember to lock the brakes each time you leave the wheelchair, even for a short time.
- ③ To lock the brakes, stand immediately or slightly diagonally behind the wheelchair, grab one push handle in one hand, and lock the brake with the other hand; do likewise on the

other side.

Lifting the casters (smaller front wheels)

- ① Step on the tipping bar, and lower the push handles.

Be sure to verbally signal your move (for example, “I’m now lifting the casters”), hold for a second, and step on the tipping bar while lowering the push handles at the same time.

Keep your balance by slightly bending forward with your knees also slightly bent, and move swiftly so as not to cause the wheelchair user to feel insecure.

- ② With the caster lifted, move the wheelchair on the rear wheels (larger wheels). Support the rear wheels by slightly bending forward with your knees also lightly bent.

Going up a step (a change in surface level)

- ① First, verbally signal what you are about to do (for example, “I’m now lifting the front of the wheelchair because there’s a change in level”); then, perform the procedure for lifting the casters.
- ② With the casters lifted off the ground, push the wheelchair slowly forward, and get the casters onto the step.
- ③ Push the wheelchair a little further. When the rear wheels (larger wheels) touch the step and stop, lift the wheelchair by the push handles while pushing it forward, taking care to avoid impact.
- ④ It is customary to get the wheelchair up a step in a forward

movement. Be sure to ask the person you are assisting if he or she is comfortable with this method beforehand.

On a rainy day...

A wet surface makes the wheelchair user and the assistant more likely to slip while going over a change in surface level. Be sure to stop the wheelchair in front of the step for a second to ensure safety and lift the caster in a stable condition.

Going down a step (a change in surface level)

- ① To go down a step, it is customary to turn the wheelchair around to go down from the rear wheels. First, verbally signal what you are about to do (for example, “I’m turning the wheelchair around because there’s a step”); then, turn the wheelchair around.
- ② Lift the push handles slightly to lower the rear wheels gently onto the lower level.
- ③ Perform the procedure for lifting the casters and pull the wheelchair slowly, while taking care not to let the footrest or the wheelchair user’s toes touch the step. Be sure to avoid impact when the rear wheels get on the ground.
- ④ Once the rear wheels are securely on the ground, lower the casters with care.

It is also possible to get the wheelchair down a step in a forward movement; however, the backward movement is recommended since it is easier to secure stability this way.

Going over a gap

- ① With the casters lifted off the ground, push the wheelchair forward. Lower the casters once the wheelchair has passed the gap.
- ② Push the wheelchair normally over the gap, only slightly lifting the rear wheels off the gap.
- ③ If the change in surface level is large, the hollow is wide, or an electric wheelchair is being used, do not try to get the wheelchair over the gap on your own (it is too risky). Seek assistance from other staff members or people around.

Pushing a wheelchair uphill or downhill

- ① Uphill
Push the wheelchair slowly and surely step by step, slightly bending forward. Remember that it will require greater force than you would imagine. Make sure not to let the wheelchair slide down.
- ② On a gentle downhill slope
Push the wheelchair facing forward, controlling its move by slightly pulling it toward you. Pay close attention to the wheelchair user's condition.
- ③ On a steep downhill slope
Turn the wheelchair around, stand behind it, and walk backward carefully, while supporting the wheelchair and paying attention to any obstacles that may be behind you.

Decide on the best possible method, considering the

wheelchair user's wish, environmental conditions relating to safety, and your physical strength.

Entering or exiting an elevator

- ① When entering or exiting an elevator, make sure that the casters are at right angles with the groove between the floor and the elevator cage so that the casters will not get caught in the groove.
- ② When exiting, be flexible in deciding whether to go in a forward or backward movement, depending on the wheelchair user's wish, the number of people in the elevator, and the size of the elevator cage.
- ③ When entering, the wheelchair must always go in a backward movement: in other words, you must enter first. Make sure that the wheelchair user's toes will not touch the closing door.
- ④ It is customary to exit in a backward movement (backward viewed from the door); however, exit in a forward movement if there is not enough room for rotating the wheelchair.

Moving from the wheelchair to a seat

Some wheelchair users prefer to transfer to a seat instead of sitting in the wheelchair for longer periods of time, remember to check the wheelchair user's preferred side for moving between the wheelchair and the seat (it is often easier to move from one side than from the other for one reason or another).

Before assisting the wheelchair user in moving, be sure to lock

the brakes of the wheelchair to stabilize it; check also that the seat is stably fixed.

Passing a narrow or crowded aisle

While passing a narrow or crowded aisle or passing through a door, take care not to let either side of the wheelchair touch the wall or other obstacle.

Body temperature adjustment

Among those whose cervical vertebrae is damaged, there are some who are unable to adjust their body temperature. Be particularly attentive when wheelchair users remain exposed to intense heat, high temperature and/or humidity, or coldness, during a long event, while queueing for entry, and so on.

3) Assisting a walking aid user

If you notice a person using a cane or other walking aid who seems to be in difficulty, be proactive and ask if you can be of assistance. Provide assistance if and as desired.

Inconveniences and worries experienced by walking aid users:

- Going up or down the stairs, walking on an uneven surface
- Rainy day: walking on a slippery surface (fear of fall), having to use an umbrella and a walking aid at the same time

- A person with an artificial leg may not be easily recognized as having an impairment.
- Some have difficulty keeping pace with others around them.
- Some have felt confused or upset before by abrupt, unsolicited assistance, with no consideration to their wishes and preferences.

4) Assisting a pregnant woman

Inconveniences and worries experienced by pregnant women:

- Fear of being pushed in a crowd or someone bumping into them (this causes them to move cautiously)
- Some pregnant women are in a mental state somewhat different from their ordinary state.
- Women in the early period of pregnancy, with little or no outward sign, are less likely to be noticed by others around them even when they do not feel well.
- Women in the later period of pregnancy have difficulty bending, crouching, keeping balance, and seeing around their feet.
- Sitting down is not always the best solution (ask what would be the most comfortable posture for them).

5) Assisting an elderly person

If you notice an elderly person who seems to be in difficulty, be proactive and ask if you can be of assistance to the person. It is important to approach them in a respectful manner since many

of them do not need assistance.

Inconveniences and worries experienced by elderly persons:

- Being lumped together as “the elderly” (individual differences are quite vast)
- In general, elderly persons have somewhat weakened vision, hearing, motor skills, and adaptability.
- Some elderly persons have difficulty moving swiftly or walking a long distance without stopping.
- Many elderly persons are more prone to lose balance and thus fall or trip, due to weaker muscular strength.

When assisting or interacting with an elderly person, you must adapt to his or her pace, taking care not to hurry him or her. Also keep in mind that speaking very rapidly can tire out your interlocutor.

6) Assisting a person with an infant

If a person with an infant requests your assistance, provide assistance as desired. Pay close attention to the infant’s behavior at all times. Promptly show the way to a cot, a rest area, or a desired facility if so requested.

Inconveniences and worries experienced by persons with an infant:

- For the person to go somewhere, the infant must be carried, held, or put in a stroller.

- Both hands are often occupied, which restricts what the person can do at a given moment.
- A toddler must be constantly watched, preventing the adult from paying enough attention to everything else.
- The adult's focus on the infant can be momentarily lost for one reason or another.

Once you arrive at your post, survey the whole area to identify in advance spots, objects, and facilities that can be dangerous to small children. Be on your guard at all times to detect any small children who may be lost, away from their parent or accompanying adult.

7) Assisting a person with an internal impairment

An internal impairment is an “invisible” impairment. Provide assistance to a person with an internal impairment if requested and as desired.

Inconveniences and worries experienced by persons with an internal impairment:

- An internal impairment is often related to the functional loss or deterioration of an internal organ. Persons with such an impairment are more prone to fatigue and/or have difficulty with certain physical movements, such as carrying a heavy object, walking fast, or walking up or down the stairs and on a slope.
- An ostomate (person who, following colostomy or

urostomy, needs to discharge body wastes through an artificial opening in the body) requires a specialized toilet.