



ActiveWellness

Learning and good health for carers

Dear Family Care,

Following a recent field worker training day, we received overwhelming feedback that there is a distinct lack of 'manual handling' training in New Zealand for families supporting people with physical disabilities, especially those with progressive neuromuscular conditions.

Often these carers are at high risk of sustaining injuries caused by improper lifting and transferring of the disabled friend or family member.

This can result from lack of knowledge, training, or sometimes having to use inappropriate equipment while they wait for new equipment to arrive, or for old equipment to be repaired.

Often these strains and injuries are not reported because the carer just has to get on with things and cope ... otherwise who will support their loved one? Also, it must be recognised that going to the GP costs money, so many of the injuries are not recorded. We do not believe this lack of manual handling training is limited to our membership or our charity. Are we alone in thinking this is a problem for all carers, not just those in our network?

Hilary Rayner

Muscular Dystrophy Association of NZ Inc

You are right Hilary that many Kiwi carers receive injuries supporting family members and friends. 42% of more than 600 carers who participated in a survey about their needs in 2007 said they had experienced injuries, but most did not seek treatment or make a claim with ACC. As you suggest, carers tend to 'soldier on', often experiencing worse symptoms and damage as a result (see Mary's story on page 20).

From this issue, we begin our advice series for carers who do a lot of manual lifting and handling. It's worth taking the time to read ACC's suggestions and to try the recommended stretches.

Look out for our new carer wellbeing and learning programme, to be launched later this year. Carers will be able to 'watch and learn' demonstrations of safe lifting and transferring practices to help them avoid common injuries!

Request our 15 minute Strength for Caring exercise programme and a free exercise band for beginners! Developed by national bodybuilding champion Wayne Halkyard, the exercises (done regularly) can build strength fast. Hundreds of readers have followed the programme ... and they say it works!

A koha of \$5 is welcome to assist with costs. Send your request to PO Box 133, Mangonui, Far North 0442 or phone 0800 777 797.



If you or someone in your family has a fall or is injured, get treatment as soon as possible. Don't wait until you feel better, as this can make an injury worse, and your recovery might take longer. Getting ACC cover is simple: your doctor, physiotherapist, or other treatment provider will submit an ACC claim for you. To learn about making an ACC claim, visit www.acc.co.nz or phone 0800 101 996.

Caring safely



Lift and transfer like the professionals!

These days, the safety of health workers is taken very seriously by employers, unions, and those who provide 'manual handling' for ill, elderly, and disabled people.

As a society, we now recognise that a person's work shouldn't put them at undue risk of harm, whether physical or psychological.

The shift towards safer workplaces has been long established. The Health and Safety in Employment (HSE) Act 1992, for example, sets out various responsibilities and guidelines for both employers and employees, to ensure that work environments are as safe as possible.

As a family carer, unlike a professional carer or nurse, you don't have access to employer support and guidance about these matters. But we can share their injury prevention methods with you, so you can be safer supporting someone at home.

■ ■ ■ Strains, slips, and falls

Roughly a third of the injuries sustained by professional (paid) carers on the job result from handling patients, mostly lifting someone onto or off a bed. Falls and slips also cause many carer injuries. Caring as a job obviously has its hazards, and the wider impacts of injury can be even greater for a family carer if there's no one who can easily step into your role.

■ ■ ■ Your wellbeing matters!

Have you ever found yourself thinking "I haven't got time to be injured"? If so, you're like many family carers, whose approach is to get stuck in and do what needs to be done – maybe at the expense of your own wellbeing.

Remember, in a professional setting, your psychological and physical wellbeing aren't things that can be overlooked – by law, your employer would be obliged to take steps to protect both.

The challenge you face as a family carer is how, without someone to look out for you in your 'workplace', you can take steps to prevent common handling injuries, and protect your overall physical and mental wellbeing.

■ ■ ■ Stretch to protect

We'll be offering injury prevention and wellbeing suggestions for family carers in upcoming issues of *Family Care*, covering things like assessing injury risks in your environment, safe lifting techniques, and working with equipment. This time, we begin with general tips to avoid injury through gentle stretching. Stretching is one of the best things you can do to prepare for the day ahead. Ideally, try to stretch before you do any lifting or handling, and stop for a few minutes to do some stretches throughout the day. Hold each stretch for around 10-15 seconds. Stretch gently and only to the point where it still feels comfortable – if you feel pain, ease off.



123...stretch!



- Stand with feet hip-width apart, knees comfortably bent.
 - Upper body upright, relaxed and moving freely.
 - Move weight from one foot to the other 10 times.



- Stand with one foot in front of the other.
 - Keep upper body upright and relaxed to move freely.
 - Move weight from front to back foot 10 times.



- Stand with feet hip-width apart, shoulders relaxed.
 - Bend your knees, keeping head up and bottom out.
 - Aim to keep knees over your toes; hold position for 3-5 seconds and repeat 10 times.



- Stand or sit tall, raise shoulders up towards ears.
 - Push shoulders down, reaching fingers towards the floor.



- Stand tall, chin in; interlink hands behind back.
 - Draw shoulder blades down and back.
 - Keep hands clasped; lift arms away from the body to stretch the chest.



- Using support, stand tall on one leg.
 - Keep knees side by side; bring heel towards your buttock to stretch front of the thigh. Try to keep your back straight.



- Stand tall, feet hip-width apart.
 - Reach for the ceiling; clasp wrist with the opposite hand and stretch up.
 - Breathe in; as you breathe out lean sideways towards the bent arm.



- Stand tall with one heel on a stable raised surface; keep both knees slightly bent.
 - Bend forwards gently.
 - Keep head up and bottom out/back.



- Kneel with legs hip-width apart and one leg out in front.
 - Move weight onto front leg, keep head up.
 - To increase the stretch move your front foot further forward.

Developed to help professional carers prevent injuries, these stretches are good for family carers too!

Follow the steps for each stretch. The green glow on the photos indicates where you should feel each exercise (though this will vary from person to person).

Do the stretches in sequence early in the day, and repeat them for tense areas of your body hourly if you can.

Most of these stretches are done standing up, so no special equipment is needed.

Done regularly, they will help to prevent strains and muscle tension ... common problems for carers who lift people and heavy equipment such as wheelchairs each day.

For more carer wellbeing and learning information, see Carers NZ's website; all past *ActiveWellness* articles can be viewed and downloaded at www.carers.net.nz

ActiveWellness is an outcome of the Government's Carers' Strategy and Five Year Action Plan!

**release
muscle
tension**

Visit www.acc.co.nz and search ACC5054 to order your own A3 size wall poster featuring these stretches. Designed for health workers, the stretches will help you to prevent injuries at home as well!