

Caring Safely

Workplace Ergonomics for Home Care Workers

How to use this checklist:

- As a summary of key messages from the video series *Caring Safely* which aims to raise awareness of manual task hazards and offers practical solutions to reduce injury risks for Home Care Workers (HCW).
- To complement existing safe work procedures, checklists and audits. Employers are encouraged to integrate this information into current resources.
- As part of a team leader's on-the-job review of a home care worker's safety and work practices. The review should be a consultative process between the team leader and HCW intended to improve work practices.
- As part of induction or periodic reviews of safe work performance.

Review the prompts and check for compliance against the 'ideal' and together with the resident, HCW and team leader, implement a plan for improved safety and work practices.

	Yes/No	Improvements
Domestic Cleaning		
Assess mop against the buying guide specifications. If the mop is not acceptable, work with the client to research the purchase of a new mop with the preferred features.		
Assess vacuum against the buying guide specifications. If the mop is not acceptable, work with the client to research the purchase of a new mop with the preferred features.		
For vacuuming and mopping 2-storey homes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a plan for vacuuming that eliminates or reduces heavy carrying up/down stairs eg. separate the barrel and wand and take 2 trips; use a light weight stick vacuum; keep one vacuum on each level; avoid vacuuming the second level until a second vacuum is purchased. • Make a plan for filling the mop bucket eliminates or reduces carrying up/down stairs. 		
Vacuuming: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear clutter and obstacles with 2 hands before picking up the vacuum • Adjust wand length to suit • Adjust suction to suit hard floors and carpet • Use forward-back lunge technique and minimise over-reaching with arms and trunk 		

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	Yes/No	Improvements
Mopping: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess location for filling mop bucket. Consider: does the bucket fit under the spout; are there awkward postures involved in reaching to spout; is there a better location for filling eg. shower rose; is a new, smaller mop bucket needed? Change movement patterns eg. switch sides and lead with different hand and leg; change technique between figure 8/side-to-side etc. 		
Cleaning shower: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply cleaning agent and provide time to work Use long-handled tools Consider sitting on stool or kneeling on mat to reduce bending 		
Changing bed sheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure access to 3 sides of the bed for changing sheets. If the bed is against the wall, discuss improvement options with the resident. Provide information to resident about bed sticks etc. for edge protection. 		
Personal cares and social support		
Review mobility screening tests. Discuss their use in the event of a deterioration in function.		
Review aids and techniques to assist car transfers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handibar Swivel cushion Slide sheet Towel to assist legs out of car Choose car park away from hazards 		
Walking aids: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the aid is under 10kg Check the aid collapses easily Observe placement of the aid in/out of car boot 		
Wheelchair: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the wheelchair against the preferred features guide. If necessary, work with the client to research the purchase or hire of a new wheelchairs with the preferred features. 		

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	Yes/No	Improvements
<p>Wheelchair placement in/out of car:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check it collapses easily and all hinges are operating well • Check the car boot space is clear • Check space around the car boot is clear of obstacles and other cars • Remove quick-release wheels and footplates if this option exists • If wheels staying on, lock wheel brakes to stabilize during lifting • Consider lifting technique: bend with knees, neutral spine, keep the load close, avoid twisting, smooth movement 		
<p>Pushing wheelchair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust handled to optimal height • Push with arms braced against the side • Use brakes on gentle downhill • Walk backwards and use brakes on steep downhill gradient 		
<p>Mobility assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage resident independence. • Ensure walking aid immediately adjacent. • If using a stick, this is generally used on stronger side. • Stand on the weaker side ie. Walking stick on one side and HCW on the other. 		
<p>Applying TED stockings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure applicator available • Ensure resident's limbs are clean and dry <p>Ensure a stool available to sit on at the resident's feet</p>		
Self-care		
Manage boundaries and avoid overcommitment eg. moving furniture, time limits, adhere to care plan.		
Stay hydrated. Plan nutritious snack for eating on the go.		
Manage heat eg. AC, fans, open windows.		
Aware of EAP services and how to access.		
Aware of Medicare-subsidised allied health services (eg. physiotherapy, podiatry, psychology) with a Health Care Plan and referral from GP.		
Aware of Medicare-subsidised psychology services with a Mental Health Care Plan from GP.		

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Conversations Starters

Gaining the cooperation of residents for making change can be tricky. Being sensitive to this and having the conversation around making change can be difficult. The following scripts are offered as conversation starters to assist HCWs to make the necessary changes for wellbeing.

Goal: Turning on the AC or fans

You: *[cheerfully]* “Hi [Name], how are you feeling today? It’s really warmed up outside, hasn’t it?”

Resident: *[responds]*

You: “It’s getting quite warm in here too – are you feeling a bit hot?”

Resident: *[may say they’re used to it or it’s fine]*

You: “You’re amazing at handling the heat. But even when we feel okay, this kind of weather can still put stress on our bodies. It’s actually safer to stay a bit cooler.”

Resident: *[may express concern about cost or energy use]*

You: “That’s totally understandable. Just so you know, even running the air conditioner for a little while can help take the edge off without using too much electricity. Plus, while I’m here helping with the cleaning and chores, I’m working up a bit of a sweat too – it’ll help us both stay comfortable and make things easier for me to keep moving around.”

Resident: *[may agree or hesitate]*

You: “Why don’t we just switch it on for a little while – maybe 20 minutes – and see how it feels? We can always turn it off again if you don’t like it. It’s all about making sure *both* of us feel okay while we get things done.”

Goal: Move bed away from wall to improve access

You: *[gently]* “Hi [Name], I wanted to have a quick chat with you about something I’ve noticed during my visits, if that’s alright?”

Resident: *[responds]*

You: “It’s about the position of your bed. With it being against the wall on one side it makes it tricky for me to help you properly with changing the sheets or giving support if needed.”

Resident: *[might be surprised or ask what the issue is]*

You: “The main concern is that when there’s no access on one side I have to climb on the bed to change the sheets. It’s very awkward and hard on my back and shoulders and actually quite difficult to get the sheets on properly.”

Resident: *[may be understanding or unsure about moving it]*

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You: “I completely understand it might feel odd to rearrange something that’s been like that for a while. But if we could shift the bed to clear space on both sides it would really help me do things more safely and comfortably. The sheets are more like to stay on properly. It also makes it easier if there’s ever an emergency.”

Resident: *[may agree or voice concerns]*

You: “We can definitely work together on it, or I can ask for support from the team if it needs more lifting. We’ll make sure it’s still comfortable for you. The goal is to make things safer for everyone.”

Goal: Buying a new vacuum cleaner

You: [friendly tone] “Hi [Name], I wanted to have a quick chat with you about the vacuum cleaner. It’s definitely done some hard work over the years! It’s quite heavy and awkward to move around and I don’t think it’s working as well as it should.”

Resident: [concerns or questions]

You: “It still works, absolutely, but newer models are much lighter and easier to handle, especially in tighter spaces. It would make the cleaning more effective, quicker and safer, not just for me but for anyone else who helps around here.”

Resident: [may worry about cost or change]

You: “I completely understand. There are actually some really affordable vacuums out there now that are lightweight and designed for small spaces. If you’d like, I can help you look at a few options or speak with your family or coordinator to find something that suits your needs.”

Resident: [may agree or want to think about it]

You: “No pressure at all, just something to consider for your safety and mine. A small change like this could make a big difference in keeping things comfortable and manageable for everyone.”

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