

The Swing Sling

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Background/objectives

Independence in transfers is a common goal in spinal cord rehabilitation. The sliding technique, with or without a board, is used when individuals do not have the capacity to weight-bear through the legs to move from Point A to Point B. The procedure requires the client to lean forward to off-load weight from the buttocks, then to push through the arms to shift the body upwards and laterally. Momentum for the manoeuvre is amplified when the head and upper body turn in the opposite direction of the hips. Challenges with transfers occur in the acute rehabilitation phase as well as with chronic spinal cord injury due to client factors such as strength, balance, pain, size and confidence. Poorly performed transfers can result in pressure wounds and shoulder strains. From a staff perspective, transfers requiring moderate to maximum assistance increase the risk of musculo-skeletal injuries. The swing sling technique was developed to facilitate functional training with at-risk clients and to provide an alternative approach to self-managed transfers.

Methods/Overview

A canvas transfer sling was modified with vertical straps to attach to the arms of the overhead mechanical lift. The client's upper thighs and buttocks are centred on the sling, and one or both vertical straps run behind the shoulders to reduce the risk of the client falling backwards. An anterior chest strap serves as a light restraint and a kinesthetic cue for the flexed position. The client is raised to a height commensurate to his/her arm strength to shift the body between surfaces. As the client becomes stronger, less fearful and more skilled in the sliding procedure, the sling is weaned off.

Results

Three case examples are provided of the swing sling being used as an interim step in learning sliding board transfers and of being the method of choice for use at home by both a newly injured client and client with chronic SCI .

Conclusion

The swing sling transfer enables a graduated approach to transfer training and allows persons with weight, arm or skin issues to perform transfers safely on their own. The sling design positions the client in an active sitting posture and the arms are free to push, pull and reach. With the mechanical assist, staff can start sliding transfer training earlier and with minimal burden in terms of effort and manpower. The swing sling transfer is appropriate for newly injured clients and for those with a chronic injury.

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