



Ambulation

What is Ambulation?

Ambulation is the ability to walk without the need for any kind of assistance. It is most often used when describing the goals of a patient after surgery or physical therapy. In order to reach a client's goal of ambulation, they may require assistance before they are able to walk around on their own.

The importance of ambulation

After a surgery, it is extremely important to get a patient moving as soon as able. The technique of early ambulation involves getting a patient up and out of bed as soon as it is medically safe to do so after a procedure. The activity will most likely be very light and may include:

- Sitting
- Standing
- Walking

It is important to get a patient to move around as soon as able because body systems slow down after surgery. Ambulating improves blood flow, which in turn can speed up the process of wound healing.

If a patient is left immobile after a surgery, constipation, gas pain, and weakness are usually reported. Sedentary behavior also reduces the body's power to fight infections, and it puts the patient at a higher risk for blood clots and pneumonia.

Ambulation is important for people, especially the elderly, even without surgery. Inactivity reduces muscle mass, strength, and reduces the oxygen capacity in the blood. As muscles begin to feel stiff and sore, movement progressively becomes more and more difficult and painful. For these reasons, ambulation is an important daily goal for all ages.

Assistive devices for ambulation

If a patient is unable to ambulate on their own, they are often encouraged to move as much as capable, even if that means introducing an assistive device.

Ambulatory assistive devices include:

- Walkers
- Canes
- Crutches
- Wheelchairs
- Motorized scooters
- Gait belts

For some patients, the goal may be to get rid of the assistive device completely. For example, a wheelchair may be used immediately after a surgery while the patient completes physical therapy. In other cases, the device may be required as part of a long-term ambulatory plan. For example, a senior may require the aid of a cane to provide them with a little more stability as they walk.

Ambulation with Assistance

The first, most crucial step to assisting with ambulation is assessing the older adult's physical state. Caregivers must gauge the patient's ability to move, current pain levels or injuries, and understand any assistive devices that may be needed in the process. Caregivers can help older adults ambulate with assistance because they are trained in the proper techniques and safety precautions.

As a family caregiver or professional caregiver, familiarize yourself with the walking equipment of those in your care, including wheelchairs, walkers, canes, etc. Walking equipment is there to make the ambulation process easier but working around them can be a bit of a dance.

Benefits of Ambulating a Patient

Keep in mind, not all ambulation requires an assistive device. Successful ambulation requires slow and steady movement with the help of a caring individual. Be aware that each new movement can cause dizziness or imbalance, so check in regularly while assisting an older adult to ambulate.

Helping older adults move and walk after a procedure,

- Improves blood circulation
- Increases appetite
- Enables seniors to recover quicker

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