



FDA SAFETY ALERT

Potential Hazards With Restraint Devices

Important Tips for the Use of Patient Restraints



Physical patient restraints can be useful in protecting the patients/residents from falls and from wandering or straying. However, restraints are not the only solution to these difficulties, and in some cases may be more dangerous. The following are important tips that can make you more aware of when and how restraints should be used. It will also help you identify problems which could have serious consequences if not responded to.

Patient Rights

Patients/residents have the right to be free from restraints. Restraint use should not be a first choice solution. Before allowing yourself or a loved one to be restrained, be sure to understand the reason for the restraint use, request a limited time frame for restraint use, and be sure that all other solutions to the problem have been exhausted.

Facility Policy

All healthcare facilities must have a written policy on use of patient restraints. Ask to see this document and be sure that you understand and are comfortable with the policy set forth by your facility.

Prescription Device

Restraints are prescription devices and may only be used if a physician, or other healthcare professional licensed to prescribe in your State, has specifically ordered a restraint for an individual. The need for the restraint must be well documented in the patient chart, and assessment of the need should continue even after the device has been ordered.

- Safety/Nursing Personnel
- Guidance
- Patient Safety

Patient Criteria

Not all patients/residents are appropriate for restraint use. For example, an agitated or seriously confused patient may not be a good candidate for restraints. The use of restraints may only add to this agitation or confusion and place the patient in jeopardy as he/she may try to escape from the device. These medical symptoms combined with the use of a restraint may lead to a serious injury or death.

Appropriate Size

It is very important to be sure that the appropriate size of restraint is selected. A restraint that is too small will be uncomfortable for the patient and may cause agitation or constriction of bodily parts. A restraint that is too large or loose, where the patient can slide down or forward, may result in asphyxiation.

Good Labeling

Manufacturers of patient restraints are now required to develop better labeling. They are also being encouraged to use graphics in improved labels, sewn directly on the device, to help ensure proper application. Look for these labels and alert a healthcare provider if it appears a device is on incorrectly or a patient is uncomfortable in a restraint.

Proper Use

For wheelchair use, be sure that the patient is upright and securely seated in the chair before applying the restraint. See device directions for correct application. Incorrect application is more likely to result in the patient sliding forward which may result in asphyxiation. For use in a bed, be sure the restraint is NEVER tied to the bed rails or mattress. The restraint should only be tied to the bed springs. Also, most restraints are not indicated for use with regular beds or regular chairs, including geri-chairs. Consult the manufacturer labeling for correct application of the restraint to any bed or chair.

Length of Wear

Any patient/resident in a restraint must be free of that restraint at frequent intervals to ensure good patient health. Long-term immobilization can contribute to various health problems including decubitus ulcers, nerve damage, incontinence, and sensory deprivation. Consult with the facility policy for the maximum length of each period of restraint use. During the time when the patient is free of the restraint, be sure that exercise, such as walking, is available and encouraged.

Patient Monitoring

Patients/residents must be monitored frequently while wearing a restraint device. As with any other medical device, supervision and monitoring are critical to ensure the safety of the patient.

Ask your facility what alternatives exist or are being developed to reduce the use of restraints. Restraints should never be used as a substitute for nursing care. They are an adjunct to proper care. In many cases, volunteers may be all a facility needs to help keep patients free from restraints. However, if you are aware of the potential dangers of restraint use and know what to look for and what to do if you see a restraint used incorrectly, it could save a patient from a serious injury or even death.