




Choosing an overhead hoist

DLF Factsheet

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes people require help to move from one position to another; yet any manual lifting and handling can place a severe strain on the person assisting, whether friend, family or professional. This often results in back pain or other injuries. By choosing appropriate equipment and using it effectively the risk of sustaining injury is greatly reduced and often the quality of life for all concerned is noticeably improved.

Some people complain a hoist takes too long to use. Perhaps this is because they are unfamiliar with the equipment, or because the equipment is unsuitable for the task. After a thorough reassessment to ensure the equipment is appropriate and with training and practice the process of using a hoist usually becomes quicker and easier. Ultimately the aim of using equipment is to reduce the risk of the injury to the lowest level possible.

This factsheet aims to provide first stop information on the types of overhead hoists available and details about their various features.

For up-to-date product and supplier information, please contact our equipment helpline, open daily from 10am to 4pm - Tel: 0845 130 9177 (local rate) or Textphone: 020 7432 8009 (standard rate). Alternatively, write to our letter enquiry service or contact us via email at advice@dlf.org.uk. Please provide us with as much detail as possible in order to help

us send you a concise and informative reply; for example, include details about the difficulties you are experiencing and perhaps an idea of the type of equipment you are looking for.

WHERE TO GET HELP AND ADVICE

It is advisable to seek independent advice before buying equipment to help you make an informed choice about the equipment you plan to use. There may be alternative solutions to a difficulty, or the local authority may be able to provide a service that will help you.

Everyone, including a carer, has the right to ask the local authority for a community care assessment. Following the assessment, the local authority must decide what, if any, action is required.

If the person assessed does qualify for services, the local authority must draw up a care plan giving information on how the client's needs will be met in an effective, safe and cost efficient way. Solutions may include the provision of a service, equipment or a combination of both.

Where the assessment highlights risk of injury from moving and handling tasks, a manual handling risk assessment will be needed and an action plan drawn up to document how tasks should be managed, what equipment should be used and how many personal assistants are needed to carry out manoeuvres.

Provision of equipment has traditionally been through social services or the community nursing service. Recent government initiatives have encouraged social and health services to combine resources to streamline equipment provision through a jointly run, integrated community equipment store (ICES).

Since April 2003 people have been able to ask for a direct payment of money instead of a council community care service. This includes the right to ask for money towards the cost of alternative equipment if this is preferred to the equipment offered by the local authority.

If a person's needs are few or simple, the local authority may not be able to provide direct help itself, but may be able to offer advice about where equipment can be bought locally, mail order suppliers or details of local support groups.

Contacting a Disabled Living Centre, which provides impartial advice and the option to try out equipment, is one of the best ways of finding out what is available. For the address of your nearest centre contact Assist UK (previously the Disabled Living Centres Council) (see useful organisations).

IS AN OVERHEAD HOIST THE BEST OPTION

Before choosing an overhead hoist you need to consider all the pros and cons and consider other possible options. This is why it is important to have a manual handling

assessment so that every moving and handling situation is reviewed and safe solutions are found. Sometimes it is not possible to find one hoist or piece of equipment to suit every situation. Remember that, as well as meeting your transfer needs, the equipment must be managed by your carer(s) and be compatible with your home environment.

An overhead hoist may:

- increase independence;
- lighten the task for carer(s);
- free floor space;
- ease the problem of storage.

But:

- it can only be used in areas covered by the track;
- may be more expensive;
- may involve structural alterations to your home;

It cannot, as a rule, be used temporarily in other environments. Sometimes simpler solutions to overcome moving and handling difficulties can be found. Other options which might eliminate lifting tasks or enable the person to move independently/with limited assistance include changing the daily routine, re-arranging furniture, training in a particular technique or using small items of handling equipment in a safe way. Small handling equipment could include:

- low friction rollers or sheets - to enable people to turn or slide up and down in bed more easily;



- wooden transfer boards - for sliding from one surface to another;



- lifting poles - to pull up on in order to partially sit or change position in bed;



- a handling belt to give the carer(s) a secure handhold when guiding the user through a transfer;



- specifically designed wheeled equipment such as wheelchairs and sanichairs could be used to move a person from one room to another.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING AN OVERHEAD HOIST

THE TASKS

Activities - is the hoist needed for one particular task, e.g. getting in and out of a swimming pool, or is it needed for several, e.g. on and off the toilet, on and off a chair? Remember to consider associated tasks, e.g. positioning slings, moving the hoist occupied and unoccupied along the track.

Use - is the hoist for independent use? Only an overhead hoist can be used independently. Will it need to reach the floor and/or lift high? Is it for one transfer in a set position or is flexibility required so that lifts can take place elsewhere within the room?

Frequency - if the hoist is for short term use only it is probably worth considering using a hoist on a gantry or a floor standing frame.

THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

- Ceiling track hoists are permanent installations.
- Ceiling joists may have to be strengthened before a ceiling track is fitted and the tops of doorways may have to be cut away to allow the track to stretch from one room to the next.
- If the ceiling is unsuitable it may be possible to install holding brackets on opposite walls and the track fitted between upright supports.
- If the hoist is to be used in the bathroom, the Electricity Board should be consulted before installation. It must be powered via an approved double wound isolating transformer which reduces the standard voltage to a 24v supply. The transformer must be installed outside the bathroom, and properly enclosed with a permanently wired connection to the electricity supply.
- Unless an X-Y track is installed, the pick

up and set down points are limited along the length of the track.

- The noise produced by the motor may be a problem, especially to neighbours if the person lives in a flat.
- Is the hoist purely for home use in one room, more than one room and/or will transfer solutions be needed in other environments, e.g. on holiday?

THE HOIST USER

- Consider whether the user's disability is likely to remain stable for the foreseeable future, or will it improve or deteriorate.
- An overhead hoist with a powered lift and traversing mechanism, together with a suitable control and appropriate slings, may enable a person to transfer independently.
- People who do not want to have structural alterations to their home may prefer to use a mobile or gantry hoist.

THE CARER

- An overhead hoist provides far less risk of injury to a carer as it removes the effort/strength required to manoeuvre a mobile hoist.
- Ceiling track hoists provide a relatively safe means of moving a person over a longer distance.

- If the carer has moved the person in the same way for years, it may take time to learn how to use new equipment and new techniques.

TYPES AND FEATURES OF OVERHEAD HOISTS

Overhead hoists consist of a powered lifting mechanism to raise and lower the user, overhead tracking suspension for easier transfers, a power supply and a sling. Different types include permanent ceiling-attached hoists, portable battery-operated hoists, XY- or H-tracked hoists, gantry hoists, wall-fixed hoists and free-standing hoists.

Permanently attached ceiling track hoists

These hoists are permanently attached to a ceiling track, and provide a powered lifting mechanism to raise the user. Movement along the track may be powered or done manually by the carer. The person is generally moved in a sling, and many designs can provide a lot of support.

Portable battery-operated hoists

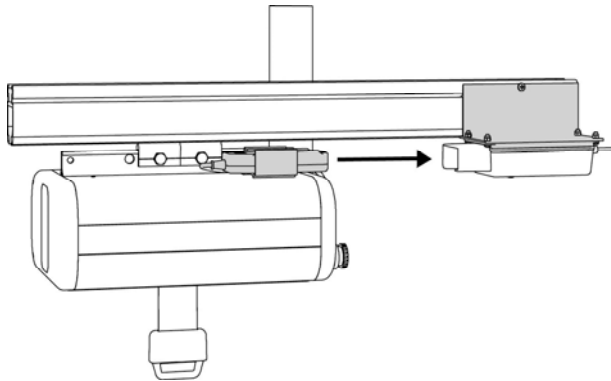


These are relatively lightweight hoists that can be detached from the track or a wall or floor frame, and moved between different locations. However, care should be taken as the units, although lighter than the fixed units, are heavy to lift and carry. Possibly useful in nursing and residential homes, where the same unit could be used in several different locations, the hoist could also be operated on several different pieces of track within a domestic setting. However, in the latter case, the carer would be required to move it several times a day, which may not be ideal.

POWER SOURCE

Ceiling track hoists can be mains or battery powered. If mains powered, in the event of a power failure, some hoists can be wound down manually to place the person onto a flat surface while others have the option of a small battery which will provide enough power to do this.

Battery powered hoists have a charging point located on the track. The hoist motor should be returned to this point after travel to ensure the hoist remains charged and therefore operational.



TYPES OF TRACK/SUSPENSION

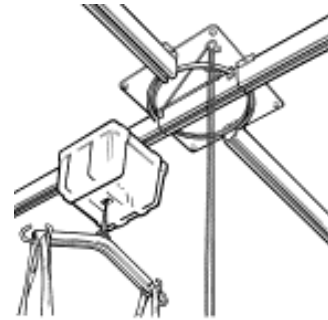
Straight track

This carries the hoist from one place or room to another in a straight line. Pick up points for the person being transferred are limited to anywhere below the track.

Angled track

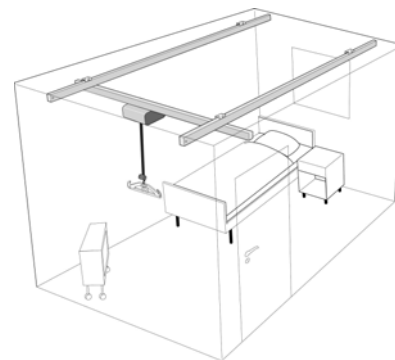
Different track angles enable the hoist to go round corners and bends. However 90° angles may be difficult to negotiate.

Turntables



A turntable enables a person who is moving along the track to turn through 90° without having to negotiate tight angled track. The person and the hoist move onto the turntable. By pushing a button or using pull cords, a mechanism is released and the straight piece of track on the turntable swivels through 90°. The hoist user can then move onto a track running in a different direction.

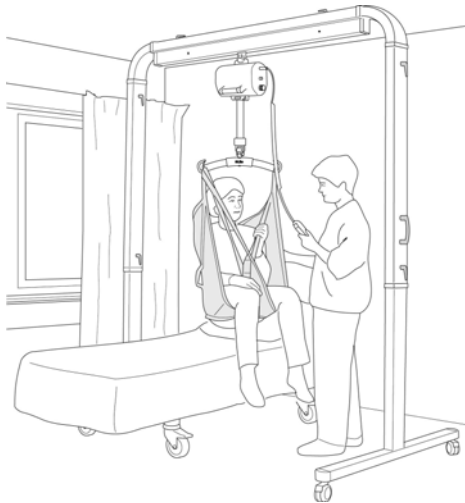
X-Y tracking system or H tracking



Some companies can install manual and/or powered X-Y systems which enable a person to be lifted from practically anywhere in a room. This is achieved by installing two parallel tracks on each side

of the room either on the ceiling or on opposite walls. A moving section of track runs between the parallel tracks. However, this type of track can only be used within one room or area.

Gantry frames

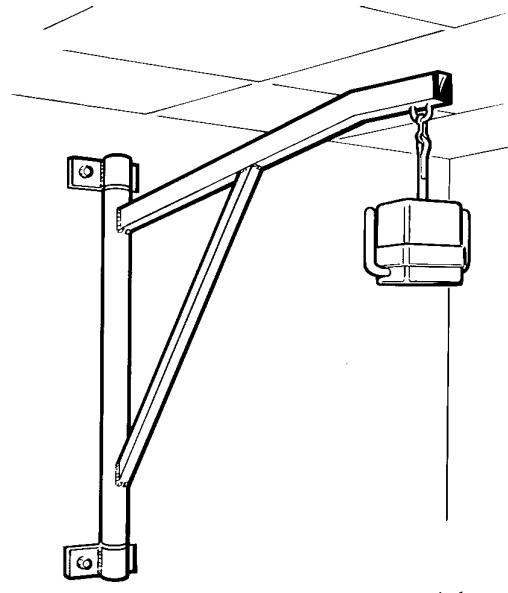


These are floor-standing frames which can be used with a mains powered permanently attached hoist unit or a battery powered portable hoist unit. They usually stand over a bed and are useful for:

- people who are terminally ill;
- people who are going to be moving or rehoused; or
- people who do not want or cannot have hoist tracking fitted in their home.

Some frames are heavy and awkward to set up, others are lighter and more manageable.

Wall-fixed hoists



These have support frames that are permanently fixed to the wall and swing through an arc of 90 degrees or more to locate the lifting unit over the user. Some have the lifting unit permanently attached; others have a detachable unit that can be used on similar frames sited elsewhere within, for example, a nursing or residential home.

A wall-fixed hoist can be used in confined spaces, but their use is restricted to short transfers.

Free standing hoists

These have a floor standing frame - similar to a lifting pole - with a boom and spreader bar that swings through 90° or 180°.

These hoists can be used:

- for transferring short distances, e.g. from bed to chair or wheelchair, from wheelchair to toilet;
- when lack of space makes the use of a mobile hoist impossible;
- when client preference or the structure of the building makes the use of a permanently fixed hoist impossible..

MOVING THE HOIST AND USER ALONG THE TRACK

Manual traversing

This requires the carer to move the person, in the sling, along the track. The design of the wheels on the hoist motor trolley makes this easy to do. However, it obviously still requires more effort than a powered traversing mechanism, and may pose an increased risk of back injury to the carer. Benefits include:

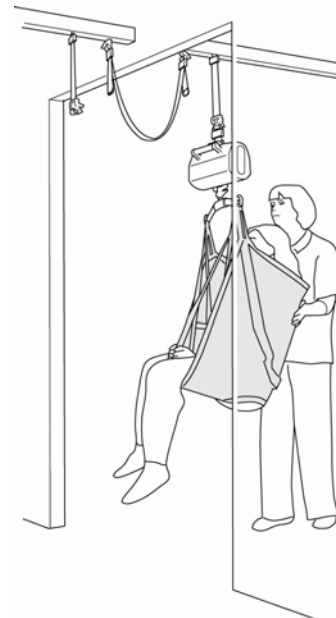
- the carer is able to control the speed at which the person is moved along the track;
- manual traversing tends to produce a smoother start and stop than powered traversing;
- it makes it easier to position a person precisely.

Powered traversing

This enables the person to move along the track independently or the carer to move him/her with minimum effort.

- The carer is unable to control the speed at which the person is moved which may be a disadvantage.
- Powered traversing tends to produce a jerky start to which both the person being moved and the carer may take some time to become accustomed.

ROOM TO ROOM TRANSFERS



Running ceiling track through from one room to another can involve costly alterations that may not always be structurally possible. Some companies offer a solution that enables the user plus lifting unit to be transferred onto track on the adjacent side of a door header using suspension straps.

LIFTING CAPABILITIES

Powered lifting mechanism

All overhead hoists have a powered lifting mechanism which will reduce the risk of back injury to the carer.

Weight capacity of hoist

Check that the weight of the person does not exceed the capacity that the hoist has been designed to work at safely.

SAFETY FEATURES AND CONTROLS

Emergency lowering

Overhead hoists have a system to lower the person in an emergency. Either there is a battery powered back-up for lowering, or the hoist is wound down.

Emergency traversing

Hoists powered by an in-built rechargeable battery store power and work for a limited period regardless of the mains electricity. Most mains connected hoists do not have an alternative emergency power source for traversing.

Automatic cut out switch

This will enable the carer to stop the hoist immediately if there is an emergency.

Controls

There are various different types:

- cord-connected handset - the carer can operate the controls while standing close to the person so that he/she can provide assistance and support during the manoeuvre. Controls should be clearly labelled; otherwise they can be used upside-down, and the person will be moved in the wrong direction;
- splash proof - enables the hoist to be used safely in the bathroom where the handset can be used in or near the bath or shower;
- pull-cord mechanism - works on a two-way, pull-cord system;
- remote control - an infra-red sensor on the hoist picks up signals from, the handset, enabling the hoist to be controlled from a distance; and useful in situations when the wires from a cord-connected handset could get caught up.

USING SLINGS ON AN OVERHEAD HOIST

Types of spreader bar

The size and type of spreader bar (sometimes also called a sling bar) will influence the comfort of the person whilst he/she is being lifted.

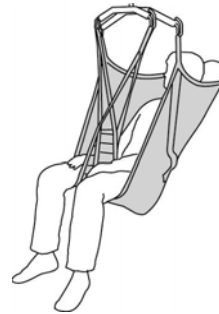
These features of the spreader bar should be considered:

- points of suspension - the number and the spacing of the points of suspension on a spreader bar will affect the comfort of the person. A single, coat hanger-shaped spreader bar basically has two points of suspension, even though there may be two or more hooks at each end. This can lead to the person feeling scrunched up especially if he/she is heavily built. A solution might be to provide side hangers which are available for some hoists that will convert the spreader bar to four points of suspension. Wishbone or Y-shaped spreader bars basically have three points of suspension which tend to provide a reclined rather than upright lifting position;
- width – the width of the spreader bar should be appropriate for the size of person being lifted and the sling being used;
- style of hook - hooks on the spreader bar take the sling loops and will have features to prevent the loop slipping off, for example the hooks might be very deep or shaped so that the loops must be slotted into the hook.
- tilting spreader bars – possible on some four-point crossbars and on wishbone or Y-shaped spreader bars. A positioning handle or a powered control can be used to tilt or angle the spreader bar. This can help the carer to put a sling on, or hold

the person in a more upright position to sit in a chair or on the toilet, or lie back in a reclined position for more comfortable transferring;

- padded spreader bars - are especially important if the spreader bar will be brought in close to the face.

Types of slings



Most companies have a good range of standard sling styles and sizes, which may include:

- divided leg slings;
- hammock slings;
- toileting/access/ independence slings;
- amputee slings;
- walking/dressing slings;
- stretcher slings.

Most companies will produce slings to meet specific requirements while some offer a made-to-measure service.

Factors to consider when choosing a sling

The choice of hoist sling will depend on:

- the amount of support required;
- tasks that need to be undertaken;
- the comfort of the person being lifted;
- the ability of the person being lifted, especially if he/she is moving independently;
- the ability of the carer.

Consider the following:

- sizes - slings always come in a range of sizes but corresponding sizes will vary from one company to another.. It is very important that the person always uses the correct size of sling, even if this means changing it if he/she gains or loses weight;
- colour coding of slings - although many manufacturers colour code their slings for size, at the moment there is no consistency between the companies which can prove very confusing;
- loops on the slings - these are for positioning the person correctly in the sling, not for trying to adjust the fit of a

sling that is too big or too small. It may take several attempts to successfully position the person so that he/she is comfortable. Once this has been achieved, it is worth marking the loops clearly

- amount of fabric - the more fabric there is in a sling, the more support it will offer and the larger the area over which the person's weight will be spread. Hence, hammock slings, which have more fabric, distribute pressure over a larger area, and are usually more comfortable than toileting slings. This is particularly important for people who are susceptible to pain;
- sling fabrics and linings - a range of different sling fabrics and linings is available. Padded and lined leg pieces tend to be more comfortable and easier to put on, mesh slings are easier to use in the bath and, if the person is sitting in a tightly moulded seat, an easy slide sling or one that can be left in place will be easier to use;
- compatibility of slings - some manufacturers stipulate that only their own slings can be used on their hoists.

This is to ensure the sling connections are correct and users have clear instructions about how to use the sling and hoist. It is also because of liability in the case of an accident. Sometimes slings have to be used on hoists manufactured by other companies. It is essential that sling and hoist are compatible and it is advisable to get

written permission from both the hoist and sling company;

- specials - the majority of manufacturers will adapt and produce special slings to accommodate the specific needs of a person and some companies produce made-to-measure slings for most makes of hoist. However, a sling can take up to eight weeks to make and can be expensive. In addition, there is no guarantee that it will solve the problem, as there is no way of trying it before it is made. Always ensure that there is not an off-the-shelf sling available that would be suitable before ordering a special. Try out different styles and sizes.

Applying the sling

When putting on slings in bed, try to raise the height of the bed to a position that is comfortable for the carer to work at.

When putting on slings in a wheelchair, commode or armchair, remember the following:

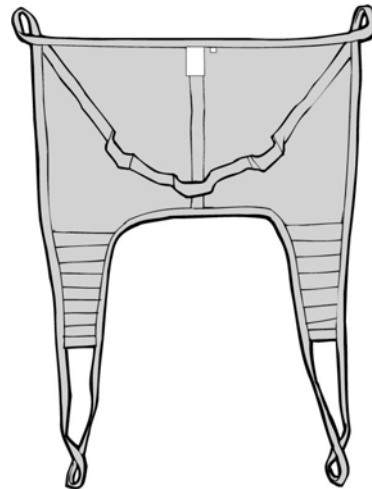
- leave the leg/footrests on the chair as this makes it easier to get the slings under the thighs;
- to get the slings under the thighs, the carer should squat in front of the chair and put the person's foot on his/her thigh so that there is enough room under it to manoeuvre the sling; in this way the person's leg is supported and the carer's back is in a good position. The carer should NOT stand up and bend over to lift one or both of the legs

to position the sling underneath.

Remember that, when trying out new slings, it may take a few attempts to find the most comfortable position, and that the first sling that is tried may not be the correct size and/or shape.

STANDARD TYPES OF SLINGS

DIVIDED LEG SLINGS



A divided leg sling is a U-shaped piece of fabric available with or without head support. This sling can be used in the following ways:

- with a leg band under each leg and then crossed in the middle. This provides the person with a reasonable amount of dignity;
- with a leg band under each leg and not crossed. This allows the legs to be kept apart for toileting and washing;
- with both leg bands under both legs.

Advantages

- Can be put on and taken off easily in most positions: sitting, lying, on the floor.
- The person may be able to put the sling on independently.
- Provides good access for toileting/washing.
- Provides a choice of leg positions.
- With the leg bands in the crossed position and with the correct sized sling, it is virtually impossible for the user to fall out.
- No user co-operation is required.

Disadvantages

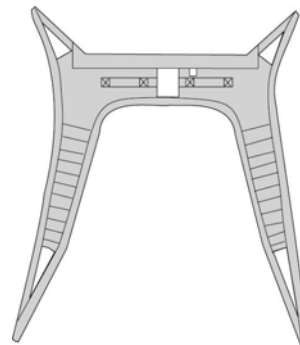
- Need to remove clothes for toileting before hoisting which may involve first transferring onto a bed.
- Leg pieces may be uncomfortable (see below).
- With both leg bands under both legs, the person may, if he goes into extensor spasm, slide out of the sling.

Comfort

- Adequate support will not be provided if the leg pieces are too narrow, or they are not positioned under the mid thighs.

- Padded or lined leg pieces are less likely to crumple when used in the crossed position and will therefore be more comfortable.
- Some companies have a loop system which holds the leg pieces together without having to cross them over. Therefore, they will not crumple at all.

TOILETING/ACCESS/ INDEPENDENCE SLINGS



This style of sling is designed to ease toileting and dressing. The sling fits around the user's chest and between his/her legs leaving a large area clear around the hips so that clothing can be adjusted more easily.

Advantages

- Can be put on in most positions: sitting, lying, on the floor.
- The person may be able to put the sling on independently.
- Provides good access for toileting/washing.

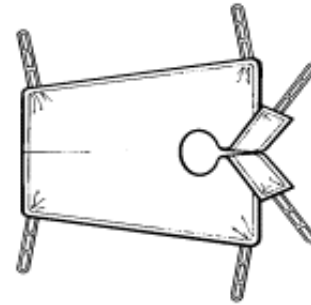
Disadvantages

- It does not provide enough support for everyone. Those with little or no muscle tone in their legs may slip through the sling.
- Although it is available with head support, most people who do not have head control will rarely have the necessary trunk control and the sling will not be suitable for them.
- The thoracic/waist band may feel restricting although it does not have to be done up tightly.
- It requires the co-operation of the person as he/she could slip through the sling if he/she raises the arms above the head.

Comfort

- Padded or lined leg pieces are more comfortable and do not crumple.
- A loop system to keep the legs together rather than crossing over the leg pieces is more comfortable and easier for the carer.
- The leg pieces should be positioned under the mid-thigh so that adequate support is provided.

HAMMOCK SLINGS



- A hammock sling is usually a rectangular piece of fabric, with or without a commode aperture.
- The person is rolled onto the sling in a lying position. If the sling is to be sat on for long periods of time, the fabric from which it is made should be considered carefully. Polyester netting may be suitable.

Advantages

- This sling is safe for most hoist users
- Many people find them very comfortable as the bodyweight is supported over a large area of material, distributing pressure.
- No user co-operation is required.
- It provides very good support.

Disadvantages

- The sling is not easy to take on and off. The person usually needs to be rolled onto it in a lying position.

- The person is not able to put the sling on independently.
- Provides little or no access for toileting/washing.
- Accurately positioning the user over a commode aperture may be difficult.
- If the person is being transferred into a chair or wheelchair, he/she may have to remain sitting on the sling as it will be difficult to re-position it when the time comes to get out of the chair.
- If being used for bathing, for example, clothes must be removed before hoisting and then he/she will have to return to the bed to get dressed again.

Comfort

- Can be comfortable for people with widespread pain, such as those with rheumatoid arthritis, as it provides full body support.
- If used in conjunction with side hangers, the person will be less scrunched up and therefore even more comfortable.

BAND SLINGS

- Band slings consist of two separate bands of material - one under the thighs and the other behind the person's back. Many accidents happen when band slings are used.
- Band slings are unsafe and should not be used. They have now been replaced

with more adaptable and supportive slings. The comparable sling is the independent or toileting sling.

SLINGS FOR USE WITH A WISHBONE SPREADER BAR

These slings have clips for attachment points on the spreader bar. They have no choice of loops. Using the moveable spreader bar will enable positions from lying to sitting to be achieved.

Advantages

- It is easy for users to reposition themselves comfortably within the sling.

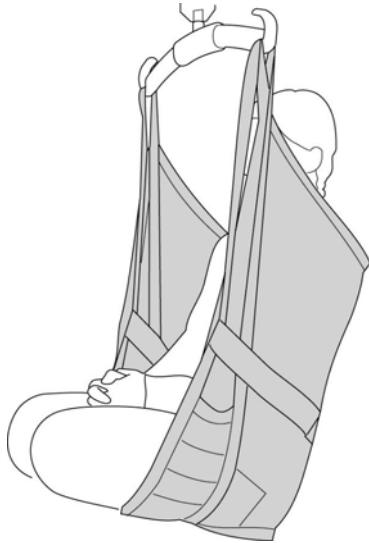
Disadvantages

- This type of spreader bar will not accommodate a hammock-type sling.
- Sling style means they cannot be used with other manufacturers' hoists.

Comfort

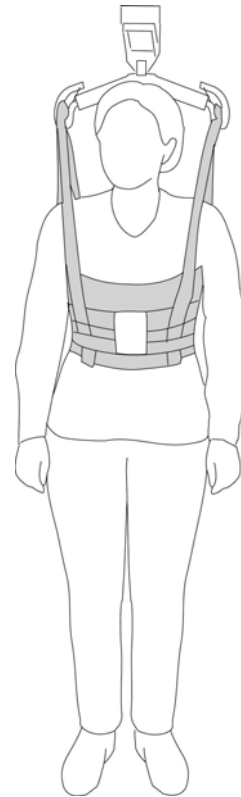
- It is generally accepted to be a very comfortable hoist and sling, due to the ease of positioning.

AMPUTEES SLINGS



Although many companies sell specially designed amputee slings, a one-piece or hammock sling used on a conventional spreader bar may serve just as well. However, the sling may need to be supplied with extra long straps or chains at the front edge if the person is to achieve an upright sitting position.

STANDING/WALKING HARNESS/DRESSING SLINGS



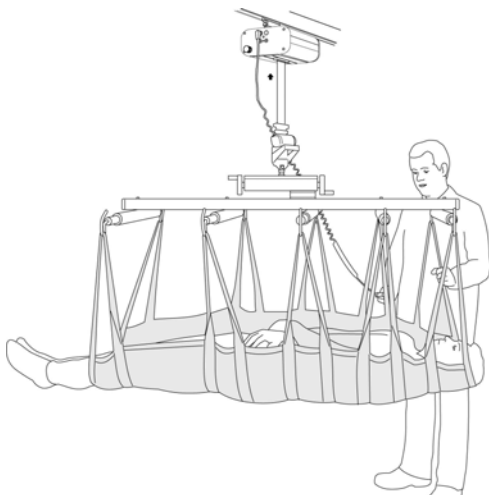
These slings are used mainly with an overhead track hoist to assist with walking, or with standing and dressing. They provide support to the trunk area of the body. The fastening mechanism allows a degree of adjustment and some makes of harness have straps that are self adjusting. Some walking harnesses also have leg straps to distribute body weight better.

LIFT PANTS



Lift pants are a shaped sling that runs between the user's legs to provide support in an upright standing position. Primarily used for confidence building when walking.

STRETCHER SLINGS



These are used to transport a person in a horizontal position. Some stretcher slings are made of fabric, others are solid. If they are to be used in an X-ray situation, check

that they are X-ray translucent. The solid stretchers are usually composed of several components which makes it easier to transfer the person.

The two halves of the frame are placed around the person lying on the bed, and then joined together. The supporting slats are then slid under the body at regular intervals and clipped into place.

DISPOSABLE SLINGS

These are made of a very strong, disposable material and are used in environments where the sharing of slings would increase the risk of cross infection. A disposable sling is used for a single person for the duration of his/her stay, then thrown away.

ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF SUPPORT

Some manufacturers of hoists offer a four-point suspension frame as an accessory for their hoist which will provide more space within the sling.

Christina Gordon Harness

This is a front fitting harness that clips onto a square spreader bar and can be used on many makes of overhead hoist and some mobile hoists.

Advantages

- A four-point suspension spreader bar can be more comfortable as the person is less scrunched up.
- The four point frame ensures that the head and shoulders are lifted first.
- It provides good access for washing and toileting.
- It can be put on in most positions: sitting, lying etc.
- The person may be able to fit the harness independently.

Disadvantages

- It cannot be used with all mobile hoists because of the clearance height needed.
- It is more expensive than standard slings.

Comfort

- The leg pieces should be positioned under the mid-thighs.
- Vest-like harness provides stability.

HANDI-MOVE FRAME

This is an adjustable metal frame with thigh stirrups and cup-shaped body supports to provide a scissor-like gripping action around the chest. One size of frame will adjust to all sizes. The person will require head control to use this system.

Advantages

- It is easy to put on, both independently or with help from a carer.
- It provides good access for washing and toileting.
- It is easy to keep clean.
- The person does not need any sitting balance, shoulder or muscle strength.

Disadvantages

- Not all people will find the chest or leg supports comfortable.

MAINTENANCE AND SERVICING

It is important that equipment such as hoists is maintained regularly to keep it in good working order.

Hoist users need to ensure daily checks are completed as recommended in the instructions for use. In the domestic situation a relative carer, formal carer, a visiting health worker or the user might complete this.

The owner of the hoist has the duty to ensure faults are repaired. It is essential to keep a note of who is the owner and where to report faults. It is advisable to keep a written record of the date and type of faults reported and of the repairs carried out. Formal checks and servicing also need recording.

It is recommended in the British Standard for mobile hoists that they should be serviced by competent personnel at regular intervals of not more than 12 months. Ensure that responsibility for this is established at the time of provision - especially if the funding has come from several sources.

The Lifting Operation and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (part of Health and Safety at Work Legislation) places a duty on the employer to ensure equipment used by the employee for lifting people is also checked six monthly by a competent person if the equipment is exposed to conditions liable to result in a dangerous situation.

It is wise to complete a six monthly check as the abilities and size of a person can vary over time, carers change and the environmental demands differ. Sometimes it is necessary to have a more frequent check.

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Website: www.backcare.org.uk

College of Occupational Therapists
106-114 Borough High Street
Southwark

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We hope this factsheet has proven useful to you. If you would like to help the DLF continue to provide valuable information such as this, you may wish to consider making a small donation towards our work. As a charity, we rely on the generosity of the public to help us continue to help older and disabled people lead independent lives.

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