Consumer Factsheet

Ceiling Hoists as a Method of Transferring People with Disability

PEER REVIEWED

What is a ceiling hoist?

A ceiling hoist is a device that consists of a track attached to the ceiling, a manual or battery-powered lifting unit attached to the track, and a sling that is attached to the lifting unit and used to transfer people between two locations, for example a wheelchair and bed. There are two types of ceiling hoists, ones with a fixed unit and ones with a portable lifting unit. Unlike a fixed lifting unit, a portable lifting unit can be attached and detached from the ceiling tracks. A range of track types are also available. Straight tracks carry the hoist in a straight line, whereas an angled track enables movement to corners and around bends. More sophisticated multi-tracking systems such as an X-Y track and H track enables a person to be lifted and transferred between any two points and at any height along the ceiling track area. There are also a variety of slings that differ in their design style, size, and type of materials (i.e. nylon mesh versus canvas etc.). All hoists require slings and the type of sling is critical to user comfort, safety, and hygiene.

Why should I choose a ceiling hoist?

Ceiling hoists are generally considered to be better than other methods of lifting and moving people with disability, including floor-based mobile hoists and moving a person by hand. With ceiling hoists, people can be transferred in much more limited spaces by the person on their own or using fewer caregivers. They do not occupy floor space and carers are required to do less during the transfer. Best of all, the use of ceiling hoists compared to either floor-based hoists or manual handling methods reduces the physical demand of carers, so reducing the amount of back strain, muscle pain, and injuries among carers.

.

Consumer Factsheet: Issue 1 June 2009. Ceiling Hoists as a method of Transferring People with Disability.
June 2009, 2nd printing April 2014
ISBN: 978-0-7334-2731-2 Consumer Factsheet Series ISBN: 978-0-7334-3458-7 **www.homemods.info**

This is significant because assisting a person during lifting and transferring activities are the main causes of back pain and injury amongst carers. Using a ceiling hoist also reduces discomfort in the back and other parts of the body such as the neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. This is important as any injuries or discomfort experienced by carers can ultimately affect the quality of care provided by them. Choosing a ceiling hoist system has the capacity to make the caring role more sustainable over a longer period of time, especially for older carers.

What regulations are relevant to ceiling hoists?

Many employers of nurses and personal care workers have 'no-lift policies' for carers to eliminate back injury. A 'no-lift policy' usually means that manual lifting is banned and mechanical lifting devices such as hoists are used instead. The Australian Nurses Federation encourages people being transferred to assist in their own transfers and advocates the use of mechanical hoists whenever possible. However, the availability of hoists within people's homes is patchy and thus the situation regarding protection of carers within home-based care settings remains unclear. Formal care provision such as personal care assistance from a paid care worker may be regulated by their employing agency's internal policies but at this time no universal regulation covering other informal personal care assistance exists.

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 10535 stipulates requirements and test methods for hoists for the transfers of people with a disability. The Australian Standard on hoists complies with ISO and requires that all ceiling hoists must incorporate an emergency lowering device, and be fitted with an alarm system to prevent a user being left hanging in the event of a failure of the hoist.

Are ceiling hoists safe for users?

Surveys of carers and users suggest that ceiling hoists have advantages over other methods in terms of patient safety and comfort, resulting in a greater preference for, and satisfaction with, ceiling hoists. Further, ceiling hoists are more effective in transferring larger and heavier users. Unlike floor-based mobile hoists, the lifting capacity of ceiling hoists can be up to several hundred kilograms. Ceiling hoists can also reduce the number of accidental injuries and associated complications, as they raise users high enough to clear any obstructions such as furnishings and fittings. Also, when using ceiling hoists, carers do not have to hold and manipulate the arms or legs of the user, increasing his or her safety, comfort and dignity during transfers. The negatives are that some users may feel uncomfortable or frightened, while suspended in mid-air during the transfer. Furthermore, accidents may occur if a user is not properly secured within the sling and/or the sling is not correctly attached to the hoist.

Can a ceiling hoist reduce care assistance?

Yes, ceiling hoists require the least assistant. With the correct use of a ceiling hoist, one carer can undertake the lifting and transferring tasks, which required two to four people in the absence of a ceiling hoist. If the user has some independent movement, it may be possible for them to fulfil the lifting task themselves using a portable hand control. Less involvement of carers means more free time among carers and independence for users. With less assistance from other people, users enjoy a greater sense of autonomy and control. Any increase in the participation in daily activities and consequent decrease in dependency on others will ultimately improve both self-esteem and quality of life.

What levels of manual handling are required by a carer to operate a ceiling hoist?

Not all manual handling can be eliminated. Assistance with helping a user into and out of a sling may still require a degree of manual handling and will vary depending on whether the user is lying on a bed or sitting in a seat or wheelchair. Rolling a user either toward or away to apply the sling and attach it to the hoist to prepare for a transfer is considered to be the most physical manual handling activity, when using ceiling hoists.

What about the speed of the transfer?

In general, floor-based mobile hoists and ceiling hoists take more time than manually assisted transfers. This is because they require more time for positioning the equipment and preparing the users and slings etc. Applying and removing slings generally take up the greatest amount of time when any mechanical device is used. The difference in time between the use of mobile hoists and ceiling hoists is hard to quantify but ceiling hoists may be up to one third faster because there is no need to negotiate obstacles on the floor and to move furniture. Other factors including the weight of the user and carpeted floors can also make it harder to manoeuvre floor-based mobile hoists and slow down the transfer process.

Are ceiling hoists easily installed?

Ceiling hoist requires a ceiling track to be installed by qualified and licensed trades persons, and sometimes door headers are required to be removed. Most importantly, the ceiling joists must be strong enough to bear the combined weight of the hoist and the user. There are ways of strengthening and reinforcing ceilings but a structural building assessment will be required. Further, if the hoist is to be used between rooms, such as to assist someone from their bedroom to their bathroom, the tops of doorways may have to be adjusted to allow the ceiling hoist tracks to operate freely. Also, because the lift has a motor, noise from the motor should be considered before installation, particularly if the hoist is to be used in apartments with tenants residing above.

Are there extra costs associated with ceiling hoists?

Like any hoist, a ceiling hoist system requires an up-front initial expense. Major factors that require expense include a qualified and licensed tradesperson to assess the ceiling and building structure, a qualified electrician to install an electrical power point near the ceiling track to charge the battery in the ceiling hoist, and the cost of the installation of the ceiling track. A need for on-going mechanical services and repairs may also require costs while in use.

Are there any subsidies to assist with the supply and installation of the ceiling hoist?

There are two national programs which subsidise the supply and/or installation of ceiling hoists: the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, accessed through My Aged Care, and the Department of Veterans Affairs' Rehabilitation Appliances Program (for eligible veterans only). Arrangements under the HACC Program are different in each State/Territory.

In addition, each State/Territory has different arrangements for subsidising the supply and installation of ceiling hoists through Aids and Appliances programs operated through their health systems. For more information, contact your local health authority.

Young people with disability may also access support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme if it is operational in their area, or through the relevant State/Territory disability support program in those areas not yet covered by the NDIS.

For insurance claims, including workers compensation and accident schemes, then the supply and fitting of the ceiling hoist should form part of your claim.

Access to all of these program subsidies requires assessment by an occupational therapist or other health practitioner as appropriate.

How do I ensure a good fit to my situation?

Ceiling hoists are permanently installed, and so there are a range of factors to consider before choosing a ceiling hoist. Therefore, it is recommended that carers and users seek the advice of an allied health professional and a builder prior to any equipment purchase. Occupational therapists are trained to assess a person's functional ability and their current and future equipment needs. Builders are required to assess the load bearing and structural integrity of a ceiling for a track to be installed. Other relevant factors to consider include: frequency of use; distance of the transfer; and all the activities that might require mechanical assistance.

***This information was correct at time of printing.*