

Independent Living Assistance

Slings



Slings are used with mobile and fixed hoists to support a person while they are being lifted and transferred.

Slings come in various materials, sizes and models.

It's important that the user's abilities and transfer requirements are assessed by a relevant health professional before you choose a sling.

What to consider when selecting a sling

- The transfer required, including the location of the transfer and the tasks to be undertaken
- The physical abilities of the person being lifted (the user), including how much support is required
- The user's physical stature, including height and build
- The user's weight. This must not exceed the load capacity of the sling as stated by the supplier
- The abilities of the attendants
- The style of hoist that is being used with the sling. This might be a standard mobile hoist, a ceiling hoist or a stand-up hoist.
- The way in which the sling attaches to the hoist

Generally, manufacturers will have a range of specific slings designed for use with their hoists.

Features of slings

There are features common to many slings:

- A central tag or strip stitched onto the outer side of the sling indicates the correct positioning for the sling. The centre of the sling is often highlighted by an arrow that is used to line up against the user's spine when fitting the sling for a lift.

- The tag may also contain information about the sling, including, size, load capacity and care instructions
- Handles or loops on the outer side of the sling are used by attendants to manoeuvre the user, for example, steering the user's bottom back into the chair. These handles are not designed to lift the user. Excessive weight on the handles may damage the seams.
- Loop or clip-on (keyhole) attachments are used to connect the sling to the hoist. The sling and the hoist attachments must match. A sling with clip-on attachments must only be used with a hoist with clip-on attachments. A sling with loop attachments must only be used with a hoist with loop attachments.
- Slings with loop attachments will often have several loops available. To place the user in a seated position, use shorter loops on the shoulder straps and longer loops on the leg straps. To place the user in a more reclined position, use longer loops on the shoulders.
- Various sizes, including small, medium, large and extra-large, are available. Corresponding sizes will vary from one manufacturer to another. Choose a sling size based on the user's height, weight and build. Each sling has a load capacity. This is the maximum recommended weight the sling is designed to hold.
- Slings are not appropriate to be left under a person while they are sitting or lying down, it may cause skin irritation or damage.

Types of slings

The following slings are used with standard mobile hoists or ceiling hoists:

- **General purpose sling:** Provides support for the user's trunk. The top of the sling finishes at shoulder level. The bottom edge of the

Independent Living Assistance

Slings

sling sits at the base of the user's spine, in line with their coccyx. The user must have adequate head control to use this sling.

- **Full body sling:** May also be known as a general purpose sling with head support. This sling provides full support to the user, including the head and neck. Again, the bottom edge of the sling lines up with the user's coccyx. The top of the sling supports the user's head.
- **Toileting/hygiene/access sling:** The base of this sling sits higher above the coccyx than other slings, allowing increased access for dressing and removal of clothing for toileting. This sling generally goes underneath the user's arms (axillae) and therefore does not support the user's shoulders, neck or head.
- **Hammock sling:** The definition of a hammock sling varies between brands but will generally feature a large rectangular piece of fabric designed to support the user's body weight over a greater area of material. There may be leg straps and a commode aperture. Hammock slings are usually designed to support the user's head. Hammock slings are sometimes suitable for amputees, and in extra-large sizes with the leg straps, may be suitable for bariatric users.
- **Amputee sling:** These can be designed without leg straps, for users with high level above-knee amputations. These slings may have a commode aperture.
- **Walking sling:** This sling provides a user with support and assistance when participating in walking or gait training, and is used in combination with specific ceiling, mobile and some stand-up hoists (where the footplate has been removed.) The sling may fit around the user in a harness style and have leg straps to help support the user's weight if required.
- **Customised sling:** Some suppliers can customise slings for particular requirements, where a standard sling is not suitable.
- **Disposable slings:** This sling is used only by a single user to help reduce the risk of cross infection. It can be used multiple times by a single user; however, once the sling is soiled or the user no longer needs it, the sling is discarded. Disposable slings are generally not safe to use once they have been washed.
- **Slings for stand-up hoists:** The standard sling used with a stand-up hoist sits underneath the arms (axillae), requiring the user to have good trunk and head control. It does not usually have leg straps, which means that the user has to be able to partially weight bear. When the user is in the semi-standing position, their clothes can be more easily accessed to assist with toileting and dressing. A similar sling with leg straps (sometimes called a transfer, transport or seating sling) is also used with stand-up hoists. The leg straps increase the safety of the user, ensuring they are still supported if they suddenly lose their ability to weight-bear whilst being lifted. Using a sling with leg straps will, however, make it harder to access clothing for toileting or dressing.

Types of materials available

Materials selection depends on the user's skin integrity and sensitivity, their continence and the activity required. Some slings have padded leg sections that may provide additional comfort to the user and help prevent leg straps from bunching up.

- Polyester mesh allows water to drain through and is quicker to dry following washing. It is often used when the transfer involves showering, or if frequent washing of the sling is required due to incontinence.
- Polyester/nylon is a pliable material, helping it to be positioned more easily. Generally, it is easily washable and will dry relatively quickly.

Independent Living Assistance

Slings

- Lambswool knitted onto a backing may provide additional comfort to the user and allow some airflow and absorption of moisture. The increased thickness of the material may make it harder to position the sling on the user. Lambswool may also be more difficult to wash and dry.

Maintenance of slings

For the safety of the user and carer, only use slings in good working order.

- Always follow the care and cleaning instructions provided by the manufacturer. Generally, slings can be machine or hand-washed and left to air dry in a shady environment.
- Do not bleach or iron slings.
- Do not dry slings in the sunshine. This will speed up the wearing process of the sling materials.
- Look for evidence of wear and tear in slings, including after laundering. Inspect slings for any damage to the material, strapping or attachments. Check the stitching for breakage, fraying or unravelling.
- Damaged slings should be repaired by the manufacturer or replaced.

Precautions when using slings

- Monitor the user's skin for any reddened pressure areas or skin abrasions.
- Be careful not to pull the sling directly across the user's skin because this may contribute to pressure areas or abrasions developing.
- Only leave slings in position underneath the user for short periods. Any bunching, tags, or rough sections of the sling may contribute to pressure areas or skin abrasions and reduce the effectiveness of any pressure management devices being used.

- Regularly reassess the user for any changes in their physical abilities to ensure that they are using the right sling.

Note: It is important to consult with a health professional with experience in hoist and sling prescription for further guidance when selecting an appropriate sling and for specific methods of transfers.

Further information and support

Through **My Aged Care** it is possible for older people to access Australian Government-subsidised services including an occupational therapist assessment and equipment. For further information and to check eligibility, call 1800 000 422 or visit www.myagedcare.gov.au/.

People under the age of 65 with a permanent disability who are **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** participants and have Assistive Technology or Consumables funding approval may be eligible for equipment including hoists and slings if these items are deemed necessary.

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help you to access useful resources and to locate equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776 or email information@catalystfoundation.com.au.

The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.

Catalyst Foundation is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Visit the website www.sa.health.gov.au for more information. Although funding for this publication has been provided by the Australian Government, the material contained herein does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Australian Government.

Reviewed March 2024