



# Choosing a Lift



**N**early 33 million Americans sustain a severe disability, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Of them, many can't bear weight when moving from place to place.

If you're one of these people, you needn't be confined to your bed. Various manufacturers offer portable total body lifts that support your entire weight so caregivers can transfer you safely. Using a total body lift is much safer than someone manually transferring you, since the lift is specifically designed to handle your weight. When manually lifting someone, for instance, caregivers must rely on their own strength to perform transfers, which often means working beyond their physical capabilities.

Most total body lifts are stable, however, requiring little force to push or pull, even when transferring a heavy person. They're also designed with slings that reduce the risk of skin tears or abrasions. If this sounds like an aid that can help you move around, learn about the following features on these lifts.

**Lifting mechanisms.** Most modern lifts have a hydraulic lifting mechanism that's powered by an electric motor and battery. The motor is an important feature because it eliminates the need for caregivers to pump or crank lifts by hand. Electric motors also make lifting and lowering easier, allowing for a smooth, continuous movement without jerky accelerations that are common with older hand crank or pump lifts. Some manufacturers' lifts also come with two-speed motors, with slow and fast options.

**Lift height range.** A lift should go to extremes in height. It should lower to the floor and help transfer you to a high bed, if necessary.

**Sling position control.** This control means either the sling is made with handles on the outside, or the sling bar has a handle as part of a pivoting frame. It's an important feature since caregivers can use the handles or bars to help position you in an upright posture before lowering you into more recumbent positions.

**Battery portability.** This feature allows caregivers to quickly exchange a dead battery with a fully charged one. Some manufacturers offer a portable battery system as a standard feature; others offer it as an option.

**Handheld control.** This feature is typically a push button control that raises or lowers the lift mast, which is the main structural support. Caregivers must be able to place this control quickly on a lift during the transfer process, because it will free up their hands to assist or position you. For this reason, a control with a magnetic attachment is preferred over one with a clip.

**Emergency shut-off control.** This control, which is separate from the hand held push button that activates a lift's motor, stops the motor in case of an emergency. It's an important feature if caregivers need to quickly shut off the power to protect you from harm.

**Manual override control.** In a situation in which the battery loses power during

a transfer, you should have a manual crank control so you can be safely lowered to the ground.

**Boom pressure sensitive switch.** This is another safety feature that senses the upward resistance of an object or a person caught underneath the boom (a beam or arm that supports the lift's sling) and automatically stops the motor. It ultimately reduces the risk of injury if you inadvertently come in contact with the boom.

**Turnaround for replacement parts.** If the lift requires repair or a part needs to be replaced, question how soon the lift will be back in service. Since many of the manufacturers' sales representatives keep a stock of replacement parts on hand, they should be able to provide you with parts within one or two days. But if they can't, the part will have to be ordered from the manufacturer. If this is the case, a U.S. manufacturer is preferred because the company can usually provide the parts faster than an international company.

**Manufacturers' sales representatives.** Most sales representatives also service their lifts, so finding a reliable one that serves your geographic area is an important consideration.

While choosing a lift can be daunting, you'll make the right decision if you understand your options. ■

• **Information adapted from the Department of Labor and Industries. Adapted via [www.lni.wa.gov/wisha/ergoideas/DocumentsFiles/Idea108\\_Liftfaq.pdf](http://www.lni.wa.gov/wisha/ergoideas/DocumentsFiles/Idea108_Liftfaq.pdf).**

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