

# Using a Gait Belt

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## What is a Gait Belt?

A gait belt is a device that helps to prevent falls. A weakened person, such as a patient in the hospital, is at risk for falls while walking or moving from a bed to a chair or from sitting to standing. Gait belts can also help the person get into or out of a car. The belt provides a "handle," of sorts, that allows someone who is walking with the weakened person to easily hold the belt and help them get back their balance if they start to fall.

## What does a gait belt look like?

A gait belt looks like a long, thickly woven cotton strap with a non-slip buckle that has "alligator teeth". The teeth help to grip the fabric of the strap and keep the belt from slipping when in place. The strap is similar to a seatbelt, but softer and thicker.

(Figure 1)



(Figure 1)

## How tight should the gait belt be?

The gait belt goes around the patient's waist snugly, but not too tight. (Figure 2)



(Figure 2)

### **Why is the gait belt long?**

Typically gait belts are very long to fit many sizes and shapes of individuals. Its best to tuck in the dangling end into the belt to prevent trips or tangling. **(Figure 3)**. It is possible to find gait belts that have been made with several fabric handles on the belt so that more than one person can grab a handle to help move the patient.



(Figure 3)

### **Why should I use a gait belt?**

Gait belts prevent falls. That's why we use them in health care settings. They are also very beneficial at home, when your elderly or weakened loved one requires extra support.

### **Is a gait belt useful with a walker or cane?**

Yes! Use a gait belt whenever the person is weak or unsteady. If your loved one has a "weak" side, be sure that you walk on that side of their body. This position will allow you to help them more effectively.

### **How do I use a gait belt?**

With the belt label on the inside, the gait belt should go at the patient's waist and be snug. If the patient has wounds located on the abdomen the gait belt may be more comfortable if worn under the arm pits **(Figure 4)**.



(Figure 4)

Fastening the buckle is like fastening the buckle of a military belt. In case you've never had to do that, here are step by step instructions and photos to help you learn how:

1. Apply the gait belt with the tag facing the patient. The end with the metal tip starts threading behind the buckle.
2. Thread the metal tip forward over the metal teeth toward the opposite side of the buckle.
3. Pull the metal tip completely through the buckle to tighten. Pull the slack through the buckle area as necessary.
4. Tuck the end of the belt under the belt as in **Figure 4**.

**Hand position while assisting your loved one to walk:**

- From behind the patient, hold the strap from underneath with your fingers pointing up (**Figure 5**).
- Grasp the belt securely. (**Figure 6**) If the patient needs more assistance hold the belt from the front with your second hand.



(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)

## How do I prevent a fall with the gait belt?

Keep close to the patient, and if they begin to lose balance pull them close to your body. **(Figure 7)** If they cannot regain balance, lower them slowly down your leg holding on to the belt.



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