

Researching Patient Lifts

The process of deciding which patient lift to purchase for yourself or a loved one can be a daunting task for anyone to undertake. This overview has been designed to provide some basic information for those who need to acquire a patient lift. As with any major decision research and knowledge are keys to making the best informed choice. Liftran Mobility has over twenty years of expertise in matching the proper patient lift with individual users maximizing safety, comfort and budget.

Background Information:

Prior to starting your search it is important to have some basic understanding of criteria you will need to select the best patient lift for your needs. It is also important to have the doctor or professional caregiver of the user acknowledge that a patient lift is appropriate for the user and no physical conditions make the use of a patient lift unsafe. Other basic information should include the following:

- Height and weight of the user
- Type of patient lifting/transfer required (from bed to chair; bed to commode; help with standing; room to room transfers etc.)
- Lifting into a bath tub requires special equipment
- Can the user support their weight while standing or are they fully dependent?
- Will someone be available to assist while lifting to act as the caregiver?
- Are there financial issues as to affordability? (there are a range of prices)
- Are there restrictions in the home as to room size or bed type limiting lift movement?
- What type of floor surface will the lift be expected to roll over?

Basic Patient Lift Types:

Patient lifts have been available since the 1950's in either manual/hydraulic operation or more recently electric battery operated. The name Hoyer lift has become synonymous

with any type of patient lift yet is in fact a well-respected brand name. There are three types of standard patient lifts to consider which will accomplish almost any type of lifting function.

A **floor type patient lift** is the most common lifter and is designed with a base on casters and a lifting arm or boom with a cradle or sling bar to attach the patient lift sling. These lifts are available with manual/hydraulic or electric functions. Floor lifts are used in cases where the user is fully depend during transfer and has minimal if any ability to help themselves stand or reposition.

The base of the lift will open or widen to accommodate toileting and fitting around wheelchairs. Often called Hoyer lifts they are designed to lift a user and reposition them on another surface. Weight capacities for floor type patient lifts vary from 300lb up to 1000lb. Digital scales are also available should weighing the user be a critical function.

A **stand assist lift or sit to stand lift** is designed for users who have the ability to support the majority of their weight while standing and also have control of their upper body and head functions. Users without those characteristics must be lifted with a standard patient lift. Stand assist lifts are used to facilitate user movement from the bed to a chair or commode and vice versa. The user is lifted up while both feet remain on a secure platform. Their knees are placed against a special pad to facilitate safe positioning. It is not necessary to lift the user to a complete upright position as long as they are up off the current surface and will be able to align with the new surface. The caregiver manually pushes the stand assist lift and user to the new location often with a simple pivot.

Use of these lifts is recommended because they greatly reduce the possibility of injury for the user or caregiver when manually lifting the user. Stand assist lifts are available in weight capacities from 300lb up to 800lb and use electric controls. Special care should be given to the type of sling, harness or vest used as this has a tremendous impact on user comfort. Users who find the process painful will resist often resulting in the caregiver reverting to unsafe manual lifting.

Ceiling and overhead lifts combine the use of an electric motor and an overhead track system to move the user from one location to another. A two function motor has an electric lift and lower function only and the user is pushed along the track by a

caregiver. A four function motor will lift, lower as well as self-propel along the track system. Ceiling lifts are used where a floor lift is not practical due to space or when transport from room to room is needed. Recent innovations have now provided affordable ceiling lift options for in home use.

Unlike floor lifts they may be positioned over a bath tub to lower a user into the water. Ceiling lift systems have weight capacities from 300lb to 1000lb. The track installation is critical to insuring safe lifting and avoiding possible serious injury so careful consideration as to how and who will do this is essential. Also due to the installation and motor cost ceiling lifts generally cost more than floor or stand assist patient lifts.

Range of Lift Height:

In the past lifting required a wide range of maximum and minimum heights due to the positioning of the user's bed. Now however beds have more positioning options and most patient lifts will lower enough to pick a user up from the floor if required. In fact the vast majority of lifts require only an 8"-12" height range to allow transfer. As long as the user is lifted enough to clear a surface there is no need to lift any higher. In addition with the advent of lower beds to assist with patient fall protection the standard height of patient lift bases or legs is in the range of 4.5". Every patient lift manufacturer now makes their lifts to conform within that range.

Patient Lift Quality:

Of course the need for quality assurance and safety are very important factors in your choice. Please be aware that the patient lift and safe patient handling industries are highly regulated. Every company selling patient lifts in North America must comply with stringent quality control requirements. Standardized government approved testing for strength and durability is mandated and records kept on file. Each patient lift must have a unique serial number for tracking purposes. The FDA website displays any issues regarding patient lift safety including product recalls.

In addition dealers who offer these lifts must insure that the products they offer meet these standards.

The most expensive and critical component of a patient lift is the electronic lifting motor or actuator as it is called. Combined with the control system the actuator is basically your engine. Buyers should know that almost all patient lift manufacturers use the same actuators and controls and do not manufacture actuators themselves.

Linak Group is the company that supplies 99% of the patient lift market with linear actuators and control systems. In fact most patient lift companies use the exact same model of Linak actuators and controls with length of piston stroke the only noticeable difference. Users may want to ask their dealer as to replacement cost for an actuator and other common parts moving forward. Prices can vary greatly by manufacturer even though in many cases they are the same basic parts.

Warranties:

In past years the industry length of warranty would vary from six months to a limited lifetime warranty on the frame only. Now you can expect the standard to be a minimum of five years on the frame or base and two years on the electronic controls and actuator. The ease of information sharing has forced the manufacturers to align themselves with their competition.

Purchasing:

As you research the market you will see that prices for patient lifts vary greatly. Lifts made from aluminum or that have additional aesthetic or functional features cost more than basic steel powder coated lifts. The country of origin where the patient lift is made and the weight capacity also impacts the cost as can currency exchanges.

The advent of online dealers has helped to lower the cost to the consumer as well. Other factors to consider are the costs of the lift slings for the lift, is freight extra and will you pay any tax?

For consumers looking for Medicare to cover the cost please note that Medicare will only supply a manual hydraulic pump lift. If using the pump will be difficult for the caregiver the purchase of an electric patient lift may be your best option. A local dealer must file the Medicare paperwork for you and approval may take some time. Recent changes within Medicare have resulted in fewer dealers being approved to file Medicare patient lift claims.

Summary:

If the basic lift function is the same up and down motion, quality assured by law, controls and actuators similar then saving money should not mean incurring risk.

Liftran Mobility has a wide selection of patient lifts and lift slings to offer at very competitive prices. Our staff is extremely knowledgeable and willing to take the time with you to help select the best lift for your needs.

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