

Disability Services

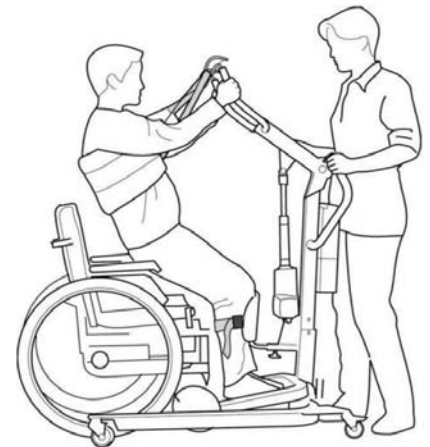
Community and Home Support SA

Information Sheet

Slings

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

Slings come in a range of materials, sizes and models, depending on the individual needs of the user and type of hoist being used. It's important to seek an assessment of the user's abilities and transfer requirements from a relevant health professional before selecting the appropriate sling.



Points to consider when selecting a sling

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

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

Features of slings

There are several features that are similar across a range of brands and models of slings:

- ▶ A central tag or strip that is stitched onto the outer side of the sling. This indicates the correct positioning for the sling, including the back and front surface of the sling and the sling centre which is often highlighted by an arrow. This arrow can then be 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 located on the outer side of the sling may be used to assist carer's to manoeuvre the user, for example, steering the user's bottom back into the chair. The handles are not designed to lift the user. Excessive weight on the handles may damage the seams.

- ▶ Slings will usually have either loop or clip-on (keyhole) attachments that are used to connect the sling to the hoist. A hoist with clip-on attachments cannot be used with a sling with loop attachments, and vice versa. It is important to ensure that the sling has the correct attachment requirements for the particular hoist it is to be used with.
- ▶ Slings with loop attachments will often have several loops to choose from. Using shorter loops on the shoulder straps and longer loops on the leg straps will place the user in a seated position. Using longer loops on the shoulders will place the user in a more reclined position.
- ▶ Most models of slings will come in a range of sizes, including small, medium, large and extra large. Corresponding sizes will vary from one manufacturer to another. The person's size, including height, weight and build will guide what size sling is appropriate. Each sling will have a load capacity which is the maximum recommended weight the sling is designed to hold.

Types of Slings

The following slings are designed for use with standard mobile hoists or ceiling hoists;

- ▶ **General Purpose Sling:** Provides support for the user's trunk, with the top of the sling finishing at shoulder level. The bottom edge of the sling is designed to sit at the base of the user's spine, in line with their coccyx. The user needs to 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 is designed to provide full support for the individual, including the head and neck. Again, the bottom edge of the sling lines up with the user's coccyx. The top of the sling should support the person's head.
- ▶ **Toileting/Hygiene/Access Sling:** The base of this sling is designed to sit higher above the coccyx than other slings, allowing increased access for removal of clothing for toileting. The sling may not provide support for the shoulder, neck and head of the user.
- ▶ **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:** Is designed to provide users with support and assistance when participating in walking or gait training, and is used in combination with selected 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 assist in supporting the user's weight if required.
- ▶ **Hammock Sling:** The exact definition of a hammock sling varies between brands but generally it features a large rectangular piece of fabric, designed to support the user's bodyweight over a greater area of material. Hammock slings are usually designed to support the head and may or may not have leg straps and a commode aperture. They will sometimes be used as an amputee sling.
- ▶ **Customised Sling:** Some suppliers are able to customise slings for particular requirements, where a standard sling is not suitable.

- ▶ **Disposable Slings:** Are designed for use by a single user to help reduce the risk of cross infection. They can be used multiple times with a single user; however, once the slings are soiled or the user no longer requires its use, they should be disposed of. Generally, disposable slings are no longer safe to be used if they have been washed.
- ▶ **Slings for Stand-up Hoists:** The standard sling used with stand-up hoist sits underneath the arms (axillas), 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 designed for use with stand-up hoists. This increases the safety of the user, ensuring they are still supported if they were suddenly to lose their ability to weight bear whilst being lifted. Using a sling with leg straps will however reduce the ease of accessing clothing for toileting.

Types of Materials

Slings come in various materials which will be more suitable in certain situations over others. This may depend on the users' skin integrity and sensitivity, continence and activity requiring sling use.

- ▶ **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 the user experiencing incontinence.
- ▶ **Canvas** is a strong material, but may feel rough on the skin.
- ▶ **Polyester/nylon** is a pliable material, helping it to be positioned more easily. Generally, it is easily washable and will dry relatively quickly. Some slings will have padded leg sections that may provide additional comfort to the user and help to prevent the leg straps from bunching up.
- ▶ **Sheepskin** 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 person. Sheepskin may also be more difficult to wash and dry.

Maintenance of slings

It is important to follow the care instructions provided by the manufacturer for cleaning requirements. Generally slings can be machine or hand washed and should be left to air dry in a shady environment.

Do not bleach, iron or dry in the sunshine as this will speed up the wearing process of sling materials.

Monitor slings for evidence of wear and tear, including after laundering. Inspect the sling for any damage to the material, strapping or attachments. Stitching should be examined for breakage, fraying or unravelling. If any damage is present, repairs should be completed by the manufacturer. Alternatively, you may need to consider replacing the sling altogether.

Precautions

Monitor the user's skin for any reddened pressure areas or skin abrasions. Be careful not to pull the sling directly across the skin as this may contribute to the development of pressure areas and abrasions. It is also best not to leave slings in position underneath the user for long periods of time, as 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 in situ.

Reassess the user on a regular basis to monitor for any changes in their physical abilities and ensure that the appropriate sling is still being used.

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

Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre.

The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre
11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Fax: 8266 5263

Email: ilcsa@dfc.sa.gov.au

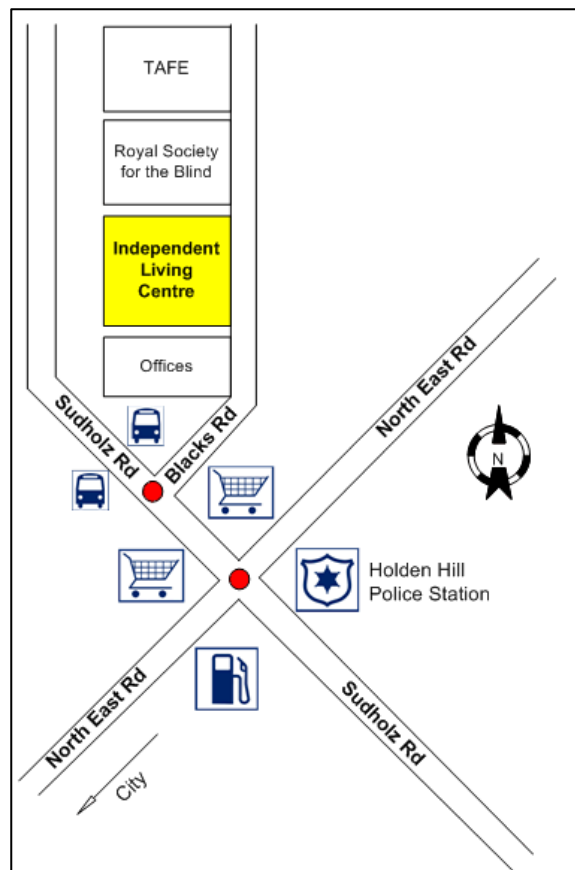
Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus routes:

From the city T500/T501 or
207/208 to Stop 28 Sudholz Road

Timetable information: 8210 1000



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