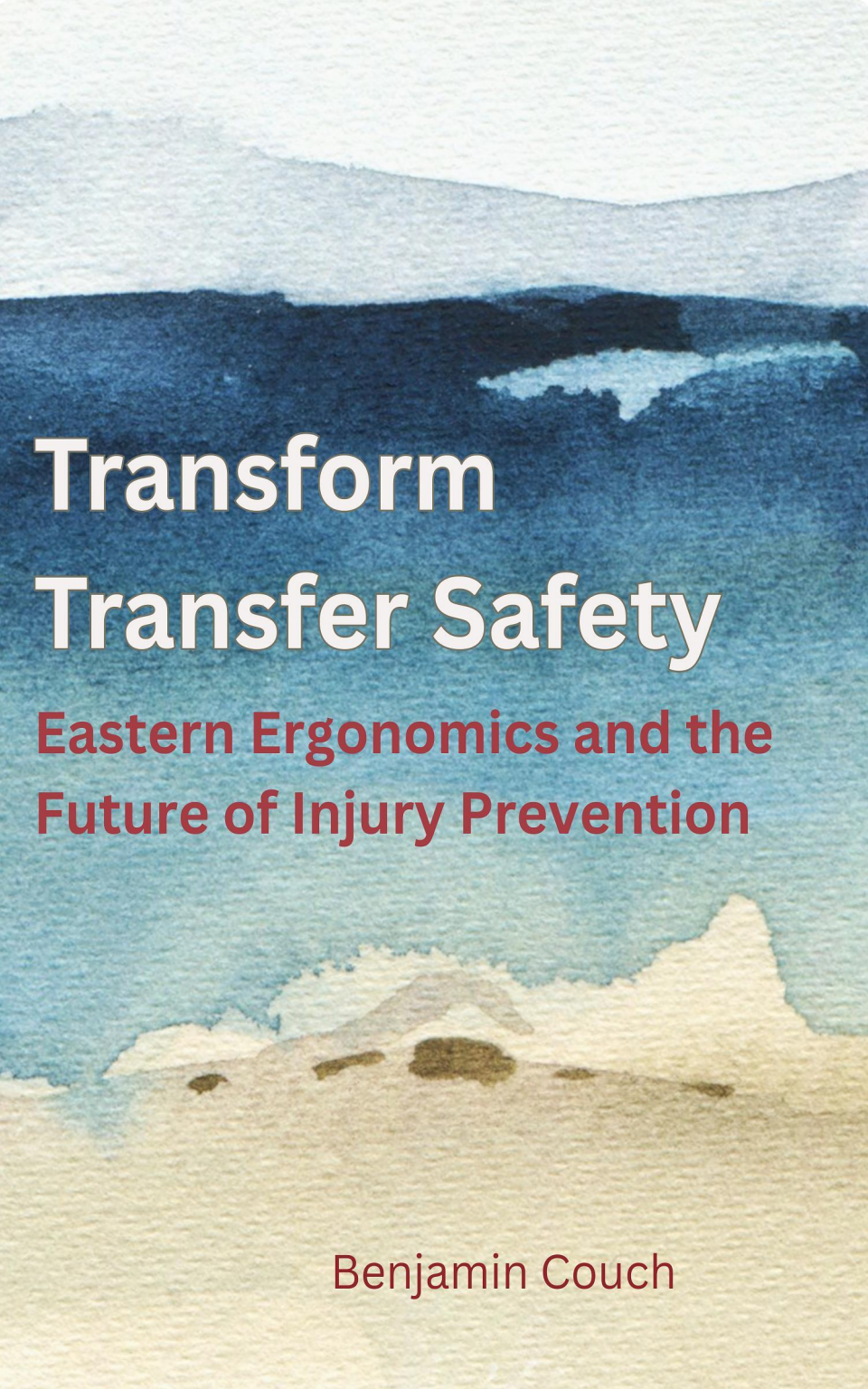
Transform
Transfer Safety
Eastern Ergonomics and the
Future of Injury Prevention
Benjamin Couch

BENJAMIN COUCH

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~for my teachers~

Contents

Introduction

My IHOP Enlightenment

Someone started to fall, and I had only a split second to react.

We were at a restaurant in Dallas before an advanced martial arts training session. Each month, I flew to Texas to train with my karate instructor for the weekend, and we maintained our pre-training routine at the same establishment: the IHOP down the street from the dojo.

While waiting to be seated, I stood next to a senior gentleman from another party. He appeared steady—until his leg suddenly buckled. His eyes widened. Time slowed. In that instant, the countless stories I'd heard from nurses and healthcare workers about injuries during patient transfers flashed through my mind.

The feeling was familiar: watching someone lose balance, experiencing that moment of uncertainty about whether intervention will help or worsen the situation.

Before he could fall, my body responded instinctively. Years

of practicing Japanese jujutsu guided my movement. Rather than attempting to lift him with brute strength, I positioned my body strategically, redirected his momentum, and with minimal effort, helped him find his own balance and regain his footing. "You're quicker than you look," he said, attempting to downplay the moment, but the relief was palpable.

In Japanese martial arts, there's a saying: *katsu jin ken*. This is often translated as "life-giving sword." It implies that a sword simply a tool, and we can choose how we use it. We can hurt people, or we can protect others.

That moment, in IHOP of all places, I instinctually used my years of training to protect another and prevent a fall. I had the opportunity to use my knowledge to help another person, and it hit me: I could use my knowledge to build a program that would keep both caregivers and patients safer during transfers.

That was the beginning of Eastern Ergonomics. Over a period of several years, I refined the concepts and formalized the system, but it all started that day while I was looking forward to my Rooty Tooty Fresh 'N Fruity pancake combo.

This book introduces concepts that can help you today, and can help even more once you complete a course with me. There's info on my live seminars in the conclusion. Because transfers are an inherently physical activity, the best way to learn this method is in person where you can feel what I do and how they work.

That said, this book will give you the concepts you need to get

started and a few ideas on how you can make your transfers safer right now, starting today!

1

The One-Minute Stretch Routine

As a healthcare professional, your body is your most critical tool. Every day, you lift, bend, reach, and move in ways that place significant strain on your back and joints. Whether assisting patients with transfers from bed to wheelchair, managing administrative tasks, or standing during extended procedures, your spine bears considerable physical demands.

Back injuries remain unfortunately common in healthcare settings—so prevalent that many professionals accept chronic pain as an occupational hazard. However, this doesn't have to be the case. The key to injury prevention isn't found in expensive equipment or lengthy training sessions, but in something far more accessible: maintaining flexibility and physical readiness throughout your shift.

Consider incorporating these stretches into your routine:

- Neck and shoulders: Gently rotate, tilt, and roll your neck through its full range of motion

- Shoulder release: Elevate your shoulders toward your ears, hold briefly, then release and lower
- Oblique stretch: Extend one arm overhead and lean laterally, then alternate sides
- Hip mobility: Perform slow, controlled circular movements with your hips
- Knee and ankle circles: Bend knees slightly, place hands on them, and rotate in controlled circles
- Calf and hamstring stretch: Place hands on a wall, step one foot back, keep the heel down, and press gently forward
- Quadriceps stretch: Using a wall for balance, lift one foot, hold your ankle, and draw your heel toward your glutes

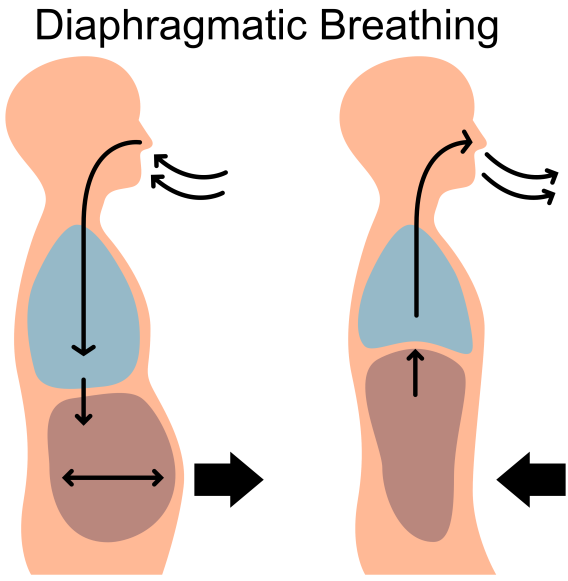
2

How Better Breathing Can Make Patient Transfers Safer

Most people don't consider their breathing patterns until respiration becomes labored. However, proper breathing technique can significantly enhance both strength and safety during patient transfers.

Diaphragmatic breathing technique:

1. Inhale slowly, allowing your abdomen to expand
2. Pause briefly at full inhalation
3. Exhale while drawing your abdomen inward
4. Repeat several cycles



This technique, known as diaphragmatic breathing, is fundamental to generating strength while minimizing strain during transfers.

For years, I believed that power in martial arts derived from the vocal projection during techniques—the kiai, or focused shout familiar from martial arts demonstrations. However, after years of training, a senior instructor shared an insight that transformed my understanding.

"The true kiai," he explained, "isn't about vocalization. It's about complete integration—muscle, focus, breath, and intention converging at the precise moment of need. It's a state of

unified action, not merely a sound. Coordinate your breath with your body and intention, and the results are remarkable."

This is critical when we're performing transfers. Our breath is tied to our movement, and a strong diaphragmatic exhale when you lift will activate your core and solidify your intention into focused movement.

Our movement is strongest when we exhale—think about performing a simple action like hammering a nail. How would it feel if you were breathing out when you made impact? Now, can you imagine if you tried to inhale while you made impact? That wouldn't feel as effective.

The same is true for transferring a patient. If you exhale when you make the transfer, you will be stronger throughout your body. When you use your diaphragm to take a deep breath, you'll be able to exhale more fully and activate your core muscles more completely.

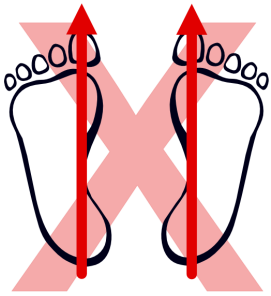
Proper breathing is critical for a safe lift.

3

Get Grounded: The Surprising Posture Fix

Proper posture and body positioning are fundamental to generating strength and maintaining structural integrity. We'll begin from the ground up, examining how foot placement establishes your base of support.

The foundation principle: When establishing a stable position, orient your feet so your lateral toes (the pinkie toes) point forward, rather than your medial toes (the big toes).



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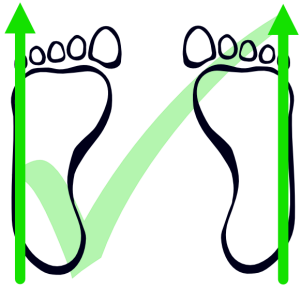

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While this isn't a natural walking gait, it provides significantly greater stability when standing in a fixed position. Maintain your weight centered slightly forward of your heels—neither fully forward on your toes nor leaning backward. This alignment creates a solid, balanced, and stable foundation.

Although we won't want to stand with our feet planted side-by-side like this for transferring people, this principle holds no matter which way you position your feet.

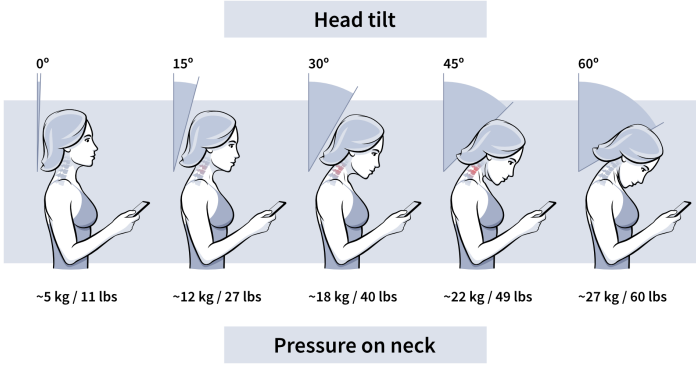
This gives us a solid foundation for how we hold our whole bodies with proper posture.

Throughout my martial arts training, posture remained a persistent challenge. Years of desk work had created habitual forward head posture and rounded shoulders. My instructor consistently reminded me: "Chin up, Ben!"

Initially, maintaining proper alignment felt unnatural. How-

ever, as I developed this habit, every aspect of my practice improved. Power and balance that had previously eluded me became accessible when needed. My movements became more precise, and training sessions required less effort—literally every technique felt stronger.

I also noticed a lot less strain on my neck and shoulders. With so many cell phones, tablets, laptops, gaming systems, and so on, many of us have developed what is called forward head position. This is where our heads droop forward because we spend so much time looking at our devices. This is a huge problem because it creates a huge amount of strain on our upper bodies and throws our bodies out of balance.



A 60-degree head tilt puts the equivalent of 60 pounds of weight on our necks!

When I introduced these same principles to healthcare settings, the results were transformative.

People who reported constant headaches from stress and neck tension started feeling relief. Staff members who had struggled with lifting and patient transfers suddenly demonstrated improved stability and confidence—not through increased strength training, but through corrected posture and structure.

When we create good structure in our bodies with proper posture, we can function with maximum efficiency. Understanding proper structure is critical when we're doing the hard work of transfers.

4

Hands Always Push

During patient transfers, push with your elbows rather than pulling with your arms.

The instinctive response when assisting someone to stand or transfer is to grasp and pull them closer. This approach feels natural—it's what we've observed countless times and what virtually everyone does instinctively, but it's not the most efficient or strongest muscle movement.

Pulling primarily engages your biceps, shoulders, and lower back—muscle groups that fatigue quickly and are vulnerable to injury. When pulling, you're working against gravity using the weakest components of your musculoskeletal system. This explains why so many healthcare workers experience strains, chronic pain, and long-term injuries.

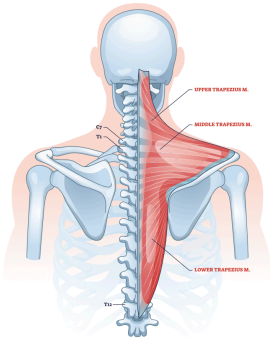
But there's a much better way.

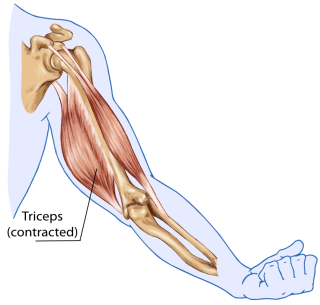
If you think about weightlifting, virtually everyone can bench

press more weight than they can when doing a bicep curl. This is because the pushing muscles, the tricep and the trapezius, are much stronger muscles than the pulling muscles used for the curl: the bicep and deltoid.

If you want to have safer transfers, you need to push the person toward you with the triceps rather than pulling with the biceps. That sounds like a contradiction, though, doesn't it? How can you push someone toward you?

The answer is easier than you might think. Imagine pushing your elbows backward and you'll quickly get the feel of things. One way to start is by standing with your back against a wall and using your elbow to push yourself off the wall. Once you're comfortable with that, try the same movement but without the wall. Just push back with the elbow.





When you push your elbows back, you activate more of your tricep and trapezius muscles. These are much stronger and safer muscles to use than the biceps and deltoids.

When coaching karate students—some half my age and considerably larger—I observe a common pattern. When they attempt to move me using pulling motions and maximum effort, they quickly exhaust themselves. Their surprise is evident when I demonstrate the same technique using pushing mechanics: the efficiency difference is remarkable. The key lies in engaging the triceps and upper back muscles rather than relying on the smaller biceps.

5

Maintaining Focus Under Pressure: Mental Techniques That Prevent Errors

I want to close out with a few concepts from martial arts that will help you keep your mental composure in addition to correcting your muscles and structure.

The first one is called "***metsuke***" (met-soo-kay). *Metsuke* is a Japanese word that translates literally to, roughly, "attaching the eyes." In practice, it is principle that tells us where to look at an opponent.

This is important for us because we tend to go where we look. When you transfer someone, ask them to look forward throughout, not down at their feet, whenever possible.

Another important concept is the Chinese idea of "***yi***" or intention. *Yi* is what lets us take all of these techniques we've learned and apply them properly. In Chinese thought, there are four "evils" that get in the way of *yi*: surprise, fear, doubt, and captivation. These steal our minds from the task at hand. We

must maintain our focus and intention to ward off these "evils" that will leave us susceptible to error and injury.

Chinese martial artists say that *xin* (heart/mind) directs *yi* (intention), *yi* directs *qi* (energy in the body), and *qi* leads *li* (movement/action).

The last concept is usually attributed to modern warriors, the Navy SEALs, though it's an ancient martial principle: "**slow is smooth, and smooth is fast**."

When we are suffering from one of the four "evils" above, we start to rush. Like the person in the horror movies who drops their keys trying to get into their car or front door, our hurry causes us to fail at even a simple task.

When we move slowly and smoothly, using the techniques we've been taught, we move efficiently. When we're efficient, we move more quickly than we realize.

Our *xin*, *yi*, *qi*, and *li* unify naturally when you simply slow down.

6

Conclusion

Moving Forward: Implementation and Support

Thank you for reviewing this guide. If these evidence-based strategies align with your organization's safety goals, implementation is straightforward.

Program Options:

Level One: four hours of hands-on training focused on safe patient transfer techniques and personal injury prevention. Designed for direct care providers seeking practical skills and confident movement with expert coaching.

Level Two: Advanced train-the-trainer certification for organizational leaders. Includes comprehensive Level One content plus a second day covering educational methodology, implemen-

tation strategies, and assessment techniques. Level Two certification authorizes participants to deliver Level One training within their facility. This one-year certification includes access to supplemental resources and ongoing support via phone, email, and video consultation.

Return on Investment: The cost of a single workplace injury is substantial—including lost productivity, replacement costs (up to $120,000 for a registered nurse), increased patient risk, and potential reputational impact. Investment in evidence-based safety training delivers measurable returns across multiple organizational metrics.

If you want to take this training to the next stages and make a huge difference in your community or facility, schedule a chat with me by emailing ben.couch@elumened.com or call me at 520.448.4071.

I look forward to helping you protect yourself and your staff for years to come.

All the best,
Ben Couch
Creator of Eastern Ergonmics