

When might bedrails be appropriate?

- Uses the rail to assist with repositioning
- Uses the rail to support transfers
- Requests rails after discussing risks and benefits
- Has been assessed as being able to use the rail safely
- The interdisciplinary care team determines the resident will benefit from their use
- Bedrail use should always be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate and safe.

Alternatives to bedrails for bed mobility and transferring

Some alternatives may include:

- Height adjusted beds
- Repositioning sheets/slides sheets
- Increased staff assistance
- Call bells within reach
- Scheduled toileting
- Increased observation and monitoring
- Mobility and strengthening programs
- Environmental modifications
- Sit to stand mechanical lift
- Personal mobility aides
- Wedges

The best approach depends on the resident's individual assessment and goals of care. For falls prevention interventions, please refer to our falls prevention program .

THE SAFEST CARE IS PERSONALIZED CARE

References

- ¹ Ontario. Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and Ontario Regulation 246/22.
- ² Health Canada. Bedrails in Hospitals, Nursing Homes and Home Health Care.
- ³ Health Canada. Hospital Bed Safety.
- ⁴ Health Canada. Bedrails in Hospitals, Nursing Homes and Home Health Care (Bed Entrapment Statistics).
- ⁵ Ontario Health atHome. Bed Safety Information Sheet.
- ⁶ Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC). Residents' Bill of Rights.
- ⁷ Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO). Residents' Bill of Rights: Your Rights if You Live in a Long-Term Care Home.



UNDERSTANDING BEDRAILS

Safety, Risks, and Resident Choice in Long-Term Care



What are bedrails?

Bedrails are devices attached to the side of a bed that may be used to:

- Assist with repositioning in bed
- Provide support when getting into or out of bed (transferring)

For some residents, bedrails may be beneficial. However, bedrails are not required for all residents and are not considered a standard safety measure. Decisions about bedrails use must be based on an assessment of each resident's needs, preferences, abilities, and risks.¹²

MYTH vs. FACT

Myth:

"Bedrails are necessary for all residents and prevent falls."

Fact:

Bedrails are not appropriate for every resident. In some cases, bedrails may actually increase the risk of injury by creating opportunities for entrapment or by causing a resident to climb over the rail and fall from a greater height.³⁴

The safest approach is individualized care planning rather than routine bedrail use.¹²

Understanding the risks



• ENTRAPMENT

Entrapment occurs when a resident becomes caught, trapped, or entangled in spaces around the bedrail, mattress, or bed frame.

This can occur:

- Between the mattress and bedrail
- Between the bedrail and headboard or footboard
- Within openings in the rail itself
- Under or around the rail

Entrapment can result in:

- Bruising
- Cuts
- Fractures
- Suffocation
- Death



• FALLS FROM GREATER HEIGHTS

Some residents may try to climb over bedrails.

This can result in:

- Falls from a greater height
- Head injuries
- Fractures
- Emergency department visits
- Hospitalization



• LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE AND MOBILITY

Assist rails may:

- Limit freedom of movement
- Reduce opportunities for independent mobility
- Contribute to physical deconditioning over time
- Discourage natural movement and repositioning

• AGITATION AND DISTRESS

Residents living with cognitive impairment or dementia may:

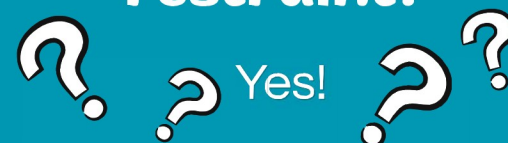
- Feel confined
- Become anxious or agitated
- Attempt unsafe exits from the bed
- Experience increased frustration when bedrails are perceived as restrictive

• SKIN TEARS AND OTHER INJURIES

Residents can unintentionally:

- Strike arms or legs against bedrails
- Develop bruises
- Experience skin tears or discomfort from contact with the rail

Could a bedrail be considered a restraint?



Depending on how it is used, a bedrail may function as a physical restraint if it limits a resident's ability to move freely and the resident cannot independently remove or lower it.

Ontario long-term care and best-practice guidance support using the least restrictive approach possible while maintaining safety.