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# Safe use of bed rails

Bed rails attach to the sides of a bed, and may be used when there are concerns about a person falling out of bed. As there are risks associated with their use, bed rails must be used carefully. This fact sheet will help you understand why your healthcare team wants to use bed rails, or is advising against them.

## What are bed rails?

Also called 'cot sides' or 'safety rails', bed rails are an adjustable device that can be attached to one or both sides of a bed. They are usually made of metal or plastic and come in different lengths and heights. They may be used with covers or padding.

Healthcare staff will discuss with you the risks and benefits of using bed rails. They will consider your wishes as well as your medical condition.

If bed rails are not suitable for you, your care team will discuss other options with you. Your family or carer may also be involved in the decision about your care.

## What are the risks of bed rails?

Sometimes illness or medication may make you confused, agitated or disoriented.

People with these conditions are at risk of climbing over the bed rails and falling, or becoming trapped in or against the bed rail. This can lead to injury or suffocation.

### Bed rails should not be used:

- if you do not want them
- if you might try and climb over the rails
- to prevent you from getting in and out of your bed (in situations where you are safe to do this and walk on your own).

## What are the benefits of bed rails?

Bed rails can help prevent you getting injured from falling out of bed.

They can also make you feel safer when in bed.

### Bed rails may be used:

- when you are being transported in your bed
- when you are recovering from a procedure or any medication that makes you drowsy
- when you are waiting for an x-ray or scan
- to help you turn over or adjust your position in bed.

Healthcare staff will only use bed rails if your situation requires them. They will ask for your consent.

You can ask them not to use bed rails, even if you have previously agreed to their use.

Bed rails will only be used for a limited amount of time.

When they are being used, you will be closely monitored.

## Are there alternatives to bed rails?

Your healthcare team will discuss alternatives with you and your family.

Options include:

- monitoring you regularly to make sure your needs are being met (e.g. having food and drink, using the toilet) so you don't need to get out of bed alone
- using a bed that can be positioned low to the floor
- using a larger bed
- placing a foam mat on the floor to prevent injuries from falling out of bed
- using other equipment to help you to turn over and reposition yourself in bed
- using an alarm to let staff know if you are attempting to move from the bed.

## What if I am worried about falling out of bed?

Your healthcare team will discuss their decision-making process with you and your family or carer.

They will provide explanations about the risks and benefits of using bed rails, based on your individual needs.

Healthcare staff can also discuss alternatives with you so that you feel safe and secure in bed if bed rails are not suitable.

## What if my condition changes?

If your family, friends or carer notice you are confused or there are changes to your thinking, they should let staff know. Bed rails may no longer be appropriate.

## Want to know more?

For tips on preventing falls in health services, go to [betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

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