

5a. Tips for handling uncontrolled movement

Positioning to Reduce Tone

1. Positioning affects tone.
2. For clients with strong extensor tone i.e. arching backwards and straightening their limbs the aim is to break the tone by positioning major joints or body parts into flexion i.e. bending forward and positioning limbs towards or across the body.
3. Never force a client's limbs or body parts, wait until the spasm passes, and allow time for them to relax.
4. The following tips may assist in reducing extensor tone:
 - Avoid dropping the client's head backwards – keep their chin near the chest.
 - Do not place pressure on the back of the client's head (crown) as this may increase tone. Instead move their shoulders and trunk forward.
 - Keep the client's hips and trunk bent forward.
 - Position the client's arms across the front of their body by controlling at the shoulders.
 - Avoid lying a tight client on their back as this can increase their tone and prevent them from relaxing. Instead position them on their side with their head and arms forward and legs bent up. Alternatively lie them on their tummy.
 - Where the client is able, encourage them to look directly ahead keeping their neck and shoulders in a neutral position, this can help to reduce high tone and help the muscles relax.
 - Make sure the client's buttocks is positioned well back on the seat. If the person is extending (pushing back), bend the hips and move the trunk forward using key points of control. Wait for them to relax and then it is easier to do up any straps.
 - Avoid pressure under the ball of the foot. Press the heel firmly into the floor/footplate.
5. When speaking to the client stand directly in front of them as changing their posture to look at you can increase tone.
6. If a client has severe spasm and is dependent for transfers then two carers will be required.

Environment

- Tone can be affected by what is happening around the client. Ensure the area is calm and quiet with soft lighting, music and voices. Bright lights, loud voices and chaos can increase the client's excitability and/or agitation and aggravate tonal problems. Ensure the room is warm especially when bathing, toileting and dressing.
- Give the client regular reassurance particularly when you are new to the client. Anxiety increases the incidence of high tone episodes.

Please turn over for Task Steps continued...

Touch

- The way you touch a client can affect their tone. Gentle firm pressure can reduce tone. Light stroking or brushing can increase tone.
- Use consistent touch cues to prepare the client. The client can learn about what's happening next however, will need time to respond.
- Refer to the client's individual communication plan for the touch cues appropriate for them.

Extra tips

To open a clenched fist for washing

- Slowly open the hand from the base of the thumb, keep the wrist bent forward.
- Gently brushing the back of the client's hand in an upward motion can assist in opening the fingers.

To open the armpit for showering and dressing –

- Hold the client's wrist and gently turn the palm of their hand up, while holding the elbow.
- Gently shake the arm to reduce the tone while moving it away from the side of the body.

To position feet on the floor or footplates

- Hold the client under the knee and lower calf
- Gently shake the leg whilst moving the foot in and bending the knee up and out.
- To stop tremor/clonus – press firmly through the joints, along the shaft of the bone eg push through the knee toward the heel, in a seated position.

Dressing the Client with Tone/Uncontrolled Movement

- Dress the client with a slow and relaxed approach.
- Prepare and position clothing in advance.
- Prepare the room in advance.
- Dress the tightest or paralysed side first and undress it last when there is most room in the clothing.
- Dress a client with high tone in a seated position whenever possible.
- If dressing in a lying position have them on their side. If the client has to be positioned on their back place a pillow under their head and shoulders or raise the head end of the bed.

Please turn over for Task Steps continued...

- Take singlet, shirts and jumpers off with a forward motion from behind the head. This keeps the neck and head forward. Pulling clothing up over the face can trigger spasm by pushing the head back.
- Do not pull on limbs. Wait for muscles to relax.
- If the person has reflex movements use them as opportunities to place clothing over outstretched limbs.
- Try to bend the client's leg at the hip and /or knee before putting on shoes and socks as this will help to break tone at the ankle and toes.
- Place clothing over both arms or legs and push clothing up the limbs as far as possible.
- Upper body – bend the client's head forward, bunch head hole area and place clothing over head from behind.
- Lower body – bend limbs and place underclothes and top clothes together as far up as possible. The client then bridge lifts or is rolled from side to side or stands to pull up clothing.
- Clothing adaptations can reduce time and effort required.

If tone/uncontrolled movement is causing manual handling difficulties expert advice may be required.