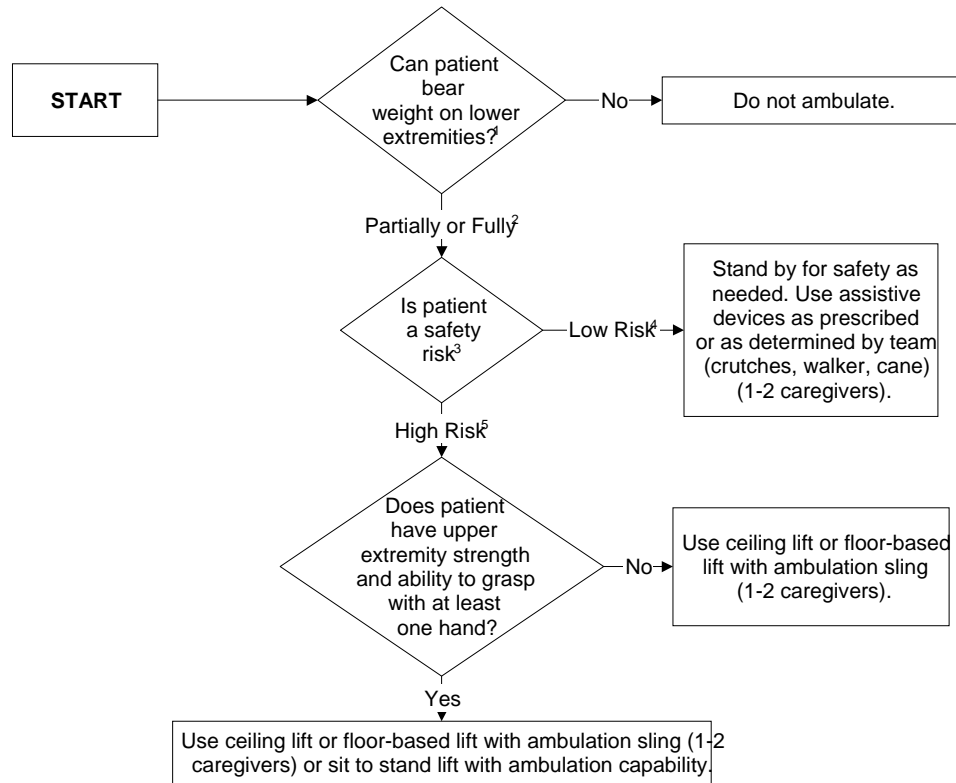


Orthopaedic Algorithm #4: Ambulation



FOOTNOTES:

1. Non-weight bearing: Patient is unable to bear weight through both lower extremities or weight-bearing through both lower extremities is contraindicated.
2. Partial weight bearing: This will include situations where the patient may be allowed: a) Limited weight bearing on one lower extremity and full weight bearing on the other extremity; b) Partial weight bearing through both lower extremities.
3. Safety risks may include: decreased cognition; decreased ability to cooperate/ combativeness; medical stability.
4. Factors that contribute to low safety risk: a) Lack of combativeness; b) Ability to follow commands; c) Medical stability; d) Experience with the assistive device.
5. Factors that contribute to high safety risk: a) Combativeness; b) Lack of ability to follow commands; c) Medical instability; d) Lack of experience with the assistive device, e) neurological deficits.

GENERAL COMMENTS/DISCUSSION:

- In healthcare, weight-bearing is often used to describe the amount of weight bearing that the patient can or has done. In orthopedics, weight-bearing status is prescribed by the physician based on the patient's ability to safely bear weight through the musculoskeletal system. Exceeding the prescribed weight-bearing status may be detrimental to the patient.
- Patients should be assessed for safety risks as described above. If patients are determined to be at significant risk for falls, then caregivers assisting with ambulation are also at risk for assisting patients to prevent fall. In high risk situations precautions should be taken, and devices such as walking slings should be used. At some point in care, the team will need to weigh the risks of falls with the benefits of ambulation and take a "therapeutic" risk in order to functionally advance the patient.
- Need to test the fit of the sling with an immobilized leg. For more information on on sling selection, see Appendix A.
- Maintain affected extremity immobilization/alignment.
- During any patient handling task, if the caregiver is required to lift more than 35 lbs./ (16 kg.) of a patient's weight, then the patient should be considered fully dependent and an assistive device should be used. (Waters, T. [2007]. When is it safe to manually lift a patient? *American Journal of Nursing*, 107(8), 53-59).