24. (a) The top brick's center of mass cannot be further (to the right) with respect to the brick below it (brick 2) than $L/2$; otherwise, its center of gravity is past any point of support and it will fall. So $a_1 = L/2$ in the maximum case.

(b) With brick 1 (the top brick) in the maximum situation, then the combined center of mass of brick 1 and brick 2 is halfway between the middle of brick 2 and its right edge. That point (the combined com) must be supported, so in the maximum case, it is just above the right edge of brick 3. Thus, $a_2 = L/4$.

(c) Now the total center of mass of bricks 1, 2 and 3 is one-third of the way between the middle of brick 3 and its right edge, as shown by this calculation:

$$x_{\text{com}} = \frac{2m(0) + m(-L/2)}{3m} = -\frac{L}{6}$$

where the origin is at the right edge of brick 3. This point is above the right edge of brick 4 in the maximum case, so $a_3 = L/6$.

(d) A similar calculation

$$x'_{\text{com}} = \frac{3m(0) + m(-L/2)}{4m} = -\frac{L}{8}$$

shows that $a_4 = L/8$.

(e) We find $h = \sum_{i=1}^{4} a_i = 25L/24$.