

Fact Sheet 5

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

When you are being assessed or choosing a manual wheelchair yourself, there are several factors you should consider; these relate to both your physical needs and your lifestyle. Remember you are unique and in choosing your wheelchair you will be making a decision based on that uniqueness. You, the user of the wheelchair, are also the only one who really knows what you need and how you can manage a wheelchair. **This is why, when any assessment takes place, you must play a full part in it.**

In your occupational therapist and other members of the assessment team are aware and priorities, they will be in a better position to recommend an appropriate chair for you of your concerns.

LIFESTYLE FACTORS.

How will you use your chair? Do you want to propel it yourself – in which case you will need a lightweight one? Will the chair have to go over rough terrain, gravel or pot-holes? If the answer is yes, check that the tyres will survive!

Is it important to you that you have regular access to work-place or certain places? If so, you should find out whether your wheelchair will fit through doorways and have enough turning room.

Will your current lifestyle and mobility be affected by your deteriorating condition, or do you expect your condition to remain fairly stable?

You should also consider how you are going to get your wheelchair in and out of your vehicle (this is likely to influence the weight of the chair you choose). Where are you going to store your chair, both at home and in your vehicle? Most manual wheelchairs fold, either by a sideways concertina action, or by detaching the wheels leaving the seating section cube-shaped.

ASSESSMENT.

While most people actively engage in all sorts of assessments throughout their daily life, a detailed assessment, (a so called wheelchair assessment) conducted in order to enable the best 'fit' possible to be found for someone wanting a wheelchair, is a long process. Wheelchair assessment is usually undertaken by therapists – they may be either occupational therapists or physiotherapists – who have specialised in this work and undertaken specific training for it.

Such an assessment is very detailed and structured to include all the following aspects of the match between user and wheelchair:

The user's

- physical strengths and limitations
- size, weight and balance
- sensory faculties
- posture and long term effects of it
- intellectual and mental capabilities
- occupation and its demands upon the chair
- mobility requirements such as
 - how far it has to go over a period of time
 - whether or not it will be carried by a car

- environment factors such as
 - the surfaces on which the chair will be used
 - the gradients (up and down) it will have to go
 - the spaces in which it will be used in e.g bathroom
 - the access there is to places the user visits
 - the manner of its storage
- social considerations such as
 - the physique and the fitness of an enabler/carer
 - what effect the use of a chair will have on the user's home and social life
 - relationships between the wheelchair user and enabler/carer
 - opportunities open to the user with added mobility and independence
 - financial position

The wheelchair's

- cost
- size in relation to the user's environment
- type of controls – manual or electric
- extra adjustments e.g reclining back, folding chair, legrests
- weight and bulkiness
- tyre type e.g pneumatic, puncture proof or solid
- maintenance requirements
- upholstery, cushions and seating additions
- wheel arrangements

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