HAD.org.uk

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Wheelchairs

If you have a “permanent and substantial disability or impairment that limits your ability to walk”, it may be worth considering using a wheelchair. Not only will this enable you to go “out and about” but it will also provide independence to a lesser or greater degree. Before considering using a wheelchair, discuss with your family or household the practical implications of using a wheelchair.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

Before you proceed, you must be clear in your mind what you want the wheelchair for. If you need it to improve your indoor mobility, you must have level or ramped access into your home. Doorways must be wide enough to accommodate the wheelchair width and there must be enough space within rooms to enable you to turn your wheelchair around.

If you are intending to use the wheelchair outside, bear in mind that handling the wheelchair over uneven ground, passing pedestrians and crossing roads, requires a fair amount of confidence. You must look at the distance you intend to travel and the routes you will be taking to get an idea of what you will be requiring your wheelchair to do. In addition to the ability to handle the controls you must also:

• Be able to judge distances and widths (to safely manoeuvre the

wheelchair between doorways and through busy streets)

• Have reasonable eyesight

• Be aware of your responsibilities as a wheelchair user

People with visual, perceptual or intellectual difficulties and who want to independently control a wheelchair should seek medical advice and have a thorough assessment at a Mobility Centre. For details of the nearest Mobility Centres, please see Useful Addresses.

You will need a secure and waterproof place in which to store your powered wheelchair, close to a power point to charge its batteries. If you are keeping your vehicle in your home, make sure access is possible. It may be necessary for you to install an access ramp leading into your home. Once indoors, ensure the vehicle is not going to obstruct essential circulation space.

If you live in a block of flats and plan to keep your wheelchair in a shared hallway, ask permission of other residents and your landlord, and inform the local fire officer to ensure that the wheelchair will not cause a hazard in a fire emergency.

TYPES OF WHEELCHAIRS

Manual self-propelled

Self-propelled chairs, as their name implies, are propelled by the user and are primarily for daily living including sport. In general, these chairs are lighter, more easily transportable and easier to maintain than powered chairs, although many people, and not only those who are unable to propel themselves,

find powered wheelchairs or scooters more convenient if, for instance, they find it difficult to transfer into a car to go to the local shops. All self-propelled wheelchairs have two large rear wheels which enable the user to propel using metal rims on the wheels.

“Active” manual wheelchairs are usually built of a very light weight, high performance frame, with multi-adjustable seat and backrest position, wheels that can be set at a “cambered angle” and variable wheel positions. These chairs are often chosen by users who are unable to transfer and lead an active lifestyle. Many active chairs are built specifically for use in a particular sport, i.e. wheelchair basketball. They are often built with a rigid frame, with removable quick release rear wheels.

“Standard” manual wheelchairs are much heavier and do not have the range of adjustments available on active chairs. They will often have “swing-out” footrests and removable armrests. Most are collapsible, allowing storage in a car boot.

Manual attendant propelled

Some users have to rely on other people to move their chairs around, perhaps because they have poor grip or are unable to manage alone or are not strong enough to self-propel. For these people an attendant propelled chair may be more suitable.

These chairs, with the small back wheels which are slightly lighter than most standard self- propelled chairs, may also meet the needs of 'occasional' users and those who use their chairs for short periods of time.

In choosing this type of wheelchair, the requirements of the attendant (pusher) has also to be taken into account.

Are the handles, by means of which the chair is propelled, adjustable, to take into account the heights of different attendants?
Will the attendant be able to fold and unfold the chair and lift it in and out of a car?

Powered Wheelchairs

Powered wheelchairs are divided into two main categories: Class 2 for pavement use; and Class 3 for pavement and road use. Class 2 powered wheelchairs can travel up to 6.4kph (4mph) on pavements and on the road only to cross from one side of the road to the other.

They can be divided into sub-sections:

Indoor use only	*Indoor & outdoor use*	*Outdoor use only*
• Small turning circle • Could be used on a level patio area or in a small, level garden • Short distance range.	• For indoor use • For outdoor use over standard terrain • Over low kerbs • Short/medium distance range	• Limited indoor use • Outdoor use including uneven ground • Kerb climbing up to 10cm • Medium to long distance range

The wheelchairs that can be used both indoors and outdoors tend to be the most popular types because they are more versatile.

Wheelchairs usually have to be taken indoors for storage and maintenance, if for nothing else, so the overall size and manoeuvrability of an indoor/outdoor wheelchair suits most people.

Class 3 powered wheelchairs tend to be larger than Class 2 vehicles and can be used on the roads where they can travel up to 12.8kph (8mph).

It may be possible to enrol on a training course and receive instruction on how to drive your wheelchair safely on the highway. Your local road safety officer or Mobility Centre (see useful addresses) may know of courses running in your area.

Standard features of class 3 wheelchairs are:

- Four wheels fitted with chunkier tyres
- Kerb climbing 10cm or more
- Long distance range
- Two-speed settings: slow (6.4kph) for pavement use, and fast (12.8kph) for road use, usually changed by the flick of a switch
- Lights, indicators, horn, rear-view mirror and rear reflectors (all required by law)

In addition, if the vehicle is to be used on a dual carriageway it must be fitted with a flashing beacon that can be used optionally when driving on all roads to make other road users more aware of the presence of a wheelchair.

All powered Wheelchairs are fitted with a control console (usually attached to an armrest) that will generally include:

- An on/off switch or key
- A control to drive and steer the wheelchair (usually a joystick)
- Switches or a dial to limit speed
- A horn
- Switches for lights or indicators
- A battery level indicator

OBTAINING YOUR WHEELCHAIR

From the NHS

The National Health Service (NHS) Wheelchair Service is provided in Harrow by a company called Opcare.

Opcare provides Posture & Mobility Services including the provision of wheelchairs, specialist wheelchair seating and pressure relieving cushions, along with associated services such as the repair and maintenance of wheelchairs. The new and improved centre is located on Oxford Road in Harrow, and we provide long term Posture and Mobility Services for clients within Harrow and Hillingdon.

Clients can choose to be seen at the service hub in Harrow or at our outreach clinics located throughout the area. Please note that waiting times and the amount of equipment that can be demonstrated will vary. There is currently one confirmed clinic planned weekly at the Oakland Medical Centre in Uxbridge, with further locations to be added in the near future. The new and improved service is a fully integrated one, providing a seamless service for our clients for all aspects of the posture and mobility service, with a single point of contact for clinical, administrative and technical services (including emergency repairs).

Opening Times:
Monday – Friday: 08:30 – 17:00.
Additional Information:
Out of hours telephone number: 07464 542717

The Government devised the Wheelchair Voucher Scheme to give disabled people more choice of wheelchairs available through the NHS. If referred to the Wheelchair Service there are three options available to you: -

1. Receive the prescribed wheelchair but the Wheelchair Service will own and cover all its maintenance and repair costs.

2. You contribute to the cost of a more expensive wheelchair from a range selected by the Wheelchair Service but the NHS will own the wheelchair and be responsible for its maintenance and repair.

3. The Wheelchair Service makes a single contribution towards the cost of a more expensive wheelchair of your choice (to meet your clinical needs). You will own it and be responsible for all servicing and repairs. The Wheelchair Service would not under any circumstances make any further contributions towards maintenance or repair. A suitable maintenance contract should be taken out at the time of purchase of the wheelchair.

Following an assessment (safety, disability and mobility requirements) by an Occupational Therapist the NHS Wheelchair Service will issue a voucher. The voucher will form part of a letter from the Wheelchair Service to the approved supplier setting out the required user specification and asking them, on receipt of the user's contribution, to provide a wheelchair that meets that specification.

The choice of wheelchair and option chosen will dictate the amount of money the disabled person needs to pay, but please note that some wheelchairs can cost well over £1,000. NHS vouchers are usually for the cost of a 'standard' wheelchair and will depend on the chair prescribed. The voucher cannot be cashed in or presented to anyone other than an agreed supplier.

You will not be considered for another voucher for at least five years, but during this time if your circumstances change you can request a review. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.

NHS Wheelchairs will normally be supplied through the Opcare Service (See above).

Self Financed

When buying a new wheelchair you have a number of choices to consider:-

- High Street retailer
- Manufacturer or Agent
- From an exhibition or promotional event.

High Street retailer

Most local Disability Equipment retailers carry a range of wheelchairs in their showrooms. Here you will get the opportunity to discuss your requirements and see and try a range of chairs from various manufacturers. Don't forget that most retailers work on a commission basis and their eagerness to sell you a particular manufacturer's range of chairs may reflect on the commission gained. Ensure that you are VERY satisfied with the chair suggested and ask if it is possible to have it on a short "trial" period before committing yourself to purchase. (Some shops will be only too happy to allow this) Ask the assistant about manufacturers warranty (It should be at least one year and cover parts and labour for this period) and of the options of purchasing an "extended warranty". If buying a powered wheelchair, ask about breakdown cover.

Manufacturer or Agent

With this option you will only have the choice of one manufacturers' range of chairs but the plus side is that it may be cheaper than the same chair from a shop as you will be "cutting out the middle man". You will also have expert advice from the manufacturer or agent. If opting to buy direct from the manufacturer or agent, be sure that you have selected your choice from a range of chairs viewed at a high street shop. The manufacturer or agent should be able to visit you at home and show a range of chairs.

From an exhibition or promotional event

A good way to buy. You can make a direct choice between a number of chairs and will usually be offered a discounted price. Do check on the delivery time – you need your chair as soon as possible, otherwise you would not be buying one in the first place.

Both the Mobility Roadshow and The Independent Living Exhibition are good places to visit.

Before considering purchasing a new wheelchair, consider the cost involved and where the money will come from. Manual wheelchairs can cost from £200 to £1,500 or more and powered wheelchairs – well the skies the limit but you will have difficulty finding a new one for less than about £2,000. If you are in receipt of the higher Mobility component of disability living allowance (DLA) you may be able to purchase one through the Motability Scheme (see the Motoring Fact Sheet)

Self Financed – Second-Hand

It is very easy to assume that you can meet your needs with a previously owned wheelchair – but be warned – your wheelchair is your legs, whether permanently or for short periods. If viewing a second-hand chair, give it a thorough try-out. If you intend using it out-doors, ask if you can take it “round the block”. Remember you are buying it “as seen and approved” and have no come-back if “bits fall off” shortly after purchase. If you are considering buying a second-hand powered wheelchair, check that the manufacturers will still repair it if it breaks down and that spares, such as batteries, are still available.

Sources for second-hand chairs include Exchange & Mart and Loot. “Disability Now” a national disability related magazine, is published monthly and carries a number of classified ads pages. You can buy one from large newsagents or telephone 0845 120 7001 for a “merchandising” copy. Also, if you have Internet access, trying Ebay, but ensure the wheelchair meets your needs, especially if you are not able to ‘try before you buy’.

Wheelchair Hire

If you do not need a wheelchair on a permanent basis, it may be worthwhile hiring a wheelchair. The following organisations can

provide this service, usually at a daily and weekly rate:

Wheels4Ease
Address: Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital
Brockley Hill
Stanmore
Middlesex HA7 4LP
Telephone: 020 8909 5282
Email: wheels4ease@rnoh.nhs.uk

Shop mobility
(Short-term hire to people with a disability)
Address: Unit 37 St George's Centre,
Harrow,
Middlesex HA1 1HS
Telephone 020 8427 1200

Direct Mobility Hire
(Can arrange delivery and collection)
Address: Warren House
201A Bury St
Edmonton
London N9 9JE
Telephone: 020 8370 7888
Website: www.directmobility.co.uk

Accessories and "Extra" costs

Once you are the owner of a new wheelchair, you may want to add on some extras or personalise it to your liking. Readily available extras include, weatherproof wheelchair capes and clothing, carry bags, clips for walking sticks and a host of other items. High Street retailers always carry a selection.

If you purchase a powered chair it might be worth considering buying a "spare" battery for use in an emergency or whilst the supplied battery is on charge.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Retail suppliers of wheelchairs and accessories near Harrow:

Mobility World Ltd
Address: 78-80, Station Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA1 2RX
Telephone: 0870 740 7772, 020 8424 2512
Website: www.mobilityworld.co.uk

FMS Mobility Centre
Address: 70-72, Victoria Rd, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 0AH
Telephone: 01895 622268
Website: www.fmsmobilitycentres.com

Keep Able
Address: 615-619 Watford Way, Mill Hill, London, NW7 3JN
Telephone: 020 8201 0810
Email: apex@keepable.co.uk

Action Mobility
Address: 45 Market Place, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks, SL9 9HE
Telephone: 01753 890616
Website: www.actionmobility.co.uk

Mobility Centres (London area)

Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Mobility Centre
Address: Damson Way, Fountain Drive, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 4NR
Telephone: 020 8770 1151
Website: email: www.qefd.org
Email: info@mobility-qe.org

Oxford Centre for Enablement
Address: Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Windmill Road, Heading ton, Oxford, OX3 7LD
Telephone: 01865 227600
Email: oxford.mobilityservice@noc.anglox.nhs.uk

This fact sheet is one of a series, providing information and advice on a number of topics.

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