

Wheelchair Buying Guide

FACT SHEET



MY REHAB TEAM
MOBILE REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS



The need for a wheelchair can happen at any point of your life. Temporary or longer term health changes can affect your mobility making it difficult for you to go out or even to get around in the home environment. These health changes can range from shortness of breath, a sprained ankle, a broken hip, frailty, etc.

You may be getting a wheelchair for yourself, a family member, a client you support, or a friend, etc. Whichever the case, when selecting a wheelchair, it is important to consider:

- the scenario when the wheelchair is to be used
- the physique of the user
- who is propelling it
- the environment where the wheelchair is to be used
- the portability requirement of the wheelchair (i.e. Does it need to be easily foldable and fitted into the boot of your car?)

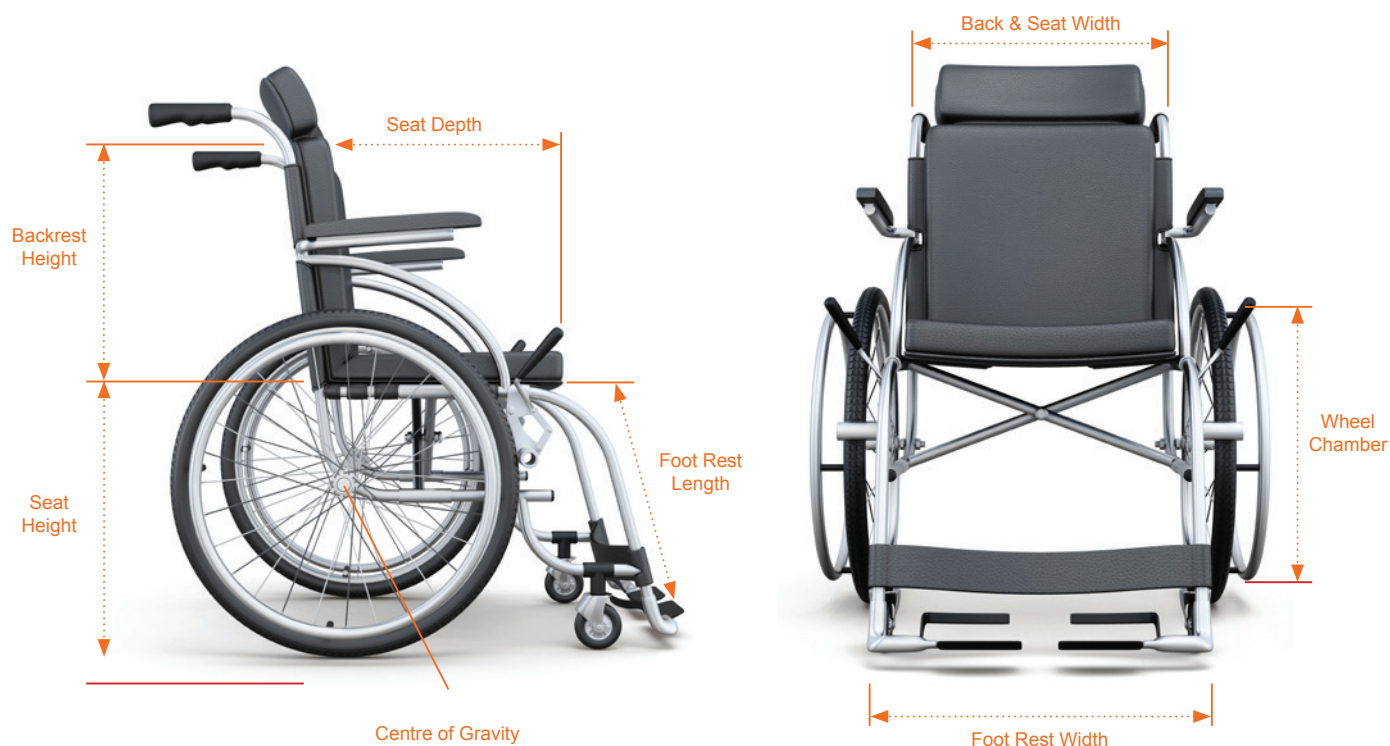
This facts sheet is intended to provide general guidance for you who is looking for a wheelchair for temporary or intermittent use.

If your need for a wheelchair is more permanently for outdoors or indoors or both, you should consult a physiotherapist to ascertain that need and/or an occupational therapist to prescribe a wheelchair that is tailored for you.

You may also be able to access government funding in this instance.

Wheelchair Dimensions

Since you could be spending a lot of time in your wheelchair, it's important to ensure that your wheelchair is comfortable to sit in and fits your requirements. Below are some measurements to be aware of.



What To Measure

A) Shoulder Width

B) Chest Width

C) Hips Width

Ensure that you can fit two fingers on either side of your thighs.

D) Width at Knee

E) Seat to Top of Head

F) Seat to Top of Shoulder (L/R)

G) Seat to Armpit (L/R)

H) Chest Depth (L/R)

From back to front of chest.

I) Seat Depth/Thigh Length

Make sure you can fit 2 fingers behind your knee crease.

J) Seat to Footplate

Make sure your thighs are level when your feet are rested on the footplates.



18 percent
of wheelchair users suffer from blisters, abrasions and lacerations.



Advice from Health Professionals

What do the experts say?

Specific measurements and angles on your wheelchair depend on your environment. To determine good width and length, there should be enough space for roughly 2 fingers on either side of your thighs and behind your knee creases when you are seated.

Although, when it comes to the height of your chair, it depends on the surface you are travelling on. If the environment is very rugged, your footplate should not be too low so it doesn't get caught on steps and raised ground.

Jien-Mae strongly advises that your hips and knees should stay reclined at around 90 degree angles if possible. It is important that you adjust your wheelchair to suit your needs, typical environment and daily life.

Jien-Mae

Occupational Therapist, My Rehab Team

The trialling process is critical in electing a chair that meets your requirement. A wheelchair that is light-in-weight makes assembling and disassembling easy for your family or carer. It also makes propulsion less effortful as well. 4 small wheels may be the cheaper option if self propulsion is not suitable or needed.

Pneumatic tyres need regular maintenance but solid tyres are less shock absorbing. Swing-away arms are more convenient to manage than detachable ones.

All in all, the main consideration should be your needs; keeping in mind that the more features, the more maintenance required.

Jo Mak

Neurological physiotherapist
Principal of My Rehab Team

As a seller of wheelchairs, 70% of Freedom Healthcare's sales are for standard/universal wheelchairs. For people seeking temporary support, adjustments and extra features are not necessary. If you are looking to spend less than a couple hours a day in it, then it is much easier to get a hold of a standard design.

For patients pursuing a wheelchair for longer periods of time, the most important thing to assess what support it provides. Seat width, length, height, depth, reclines and back bending are vital features that help to support your body during prolonged periods spent in the chair. During the trialling process, thoroughly assess these qualities, as you do not want to end up with any pain or discomfort.

Freedom Healthcare

Wheelchair Supplier



Barry's Story

Motor-bike accident victim Barry shares his experience on choosing a wheelchair.

After being involved in a motorbike accident sustaining multiple fractures and soft tissue injuries in his leg, Barry spent 2 months in a wheelchair. He currently uses a wheelchair intermittently whenever he has another procedure done for his leg.

He uses a standard wheelchair with extendable leg-rest that enables his leg to be elevated as his knee is unable to bend freely and he experiences severe swelling in his leg.

When choosing a wheelchair, Barry's number one piece of advice is to make sure that your wheelchair is light as this ensures that the transportation of the wheelchair in and out of buildings and vehicles is relatively strain-free. He warns that the last thing that you want is to gain weight when you are not very mobile. Not only does it affect the fit of your wheelchair, it makes propulsion a lot harder. Having a larger wheelchair also makes community accessibility more difficult.

Accessories such as anti-tip wheels, outer rim for propulsion and wire spoke wheels for easy rolling are beneficial features. A chair that suits your physique and gives your body support is important to help you come out of it feeling stronger.

His final advice is that for consumers to test out the wheelchair before purchase and to make sure that you try a few before making up your mind.

"...make sure that your wheelchair is light as this ensures that the transportation of the wheelchair in and out of buildings and vehicles is relatively strain-free."

Types of Wheelchairs

There are many types of wheelchairs available on the market today. It is difficult to navigate the waters without having an overview of the features and accessories possible, so that you can direct your search according to your needs.



ELECTRIC POWERED WHEELCHAIRS

This wheelchair is able to travel far distances with minimal effort. It often operates via a joystick or button control. It is recommended only for those requiring a wheelchair permanently as they can be quite expensive to purchase and hard to maintain. Users will need to have safety awareness and decision making ability to be able to control this wheelchair on their own. It cannot be folded up and placed into the boot of a car. Therefore, specialised transportation such as a disability van with a lift or ramp is required. It is not the same as a motorised scooter as it is customised built to meet the user's needs. Please contact an Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist for further advice.

TILT-IN SPACE WHEELCHAIRS

This is another custom-built wheelchair. The tilt in space function helps to prevent the development of bottom sores for users who are sitting in the chair for long periods of time. It also gives user a rest should they become fatigue in the upright sitting position.



MANUAL WHEELCHAIRS

Most commonly prescribed wheelchairs can come in various types: **standard** or **custom-built**. A standard type can be purchased without a therapist's assessment. A custom one may be prescribed by a physiotherapist or occupational therapist to meet your specific needs.

Self-Propelled

This type has large back wheels and wheel rims to enable the user to self propel.



Attendant- Propelled

This type has 4 wheels of similar size. A helper will need to propel this for the user. This is suitable for someone who struggles to propel the wheelchair by themselves.



Power Assist Devices

This provides an extra boost to manual wheelchairs by reducing the effort the user needs to propel the wheelchair. Their function is similar to powered wheelchairs with the difference being detachable.



Useful Features To Look For



SWING-AWAY ARMS



EXTENDABLE LEGS



**FOLDABLE
WHEELCHAIR**



SMALLER WHEELS



PROPULSION RIM

Wheel Chair Suppliers

Freedom Healthcare
88 Parramatta Road
Underwood
07 3801 3910

Aidacare
30 Dulacca Street
Acacia Ridge
07 3086 2900

Walk On Wheels
1/260 Leitchs Road
Brendale
07 3205 5654

Active Medical
35 Southgate Avenue
Cannon Hill
07 3899 8887

Elan Medical
112 Harburg Drive
Beenleigh
07 3807 0551

Queensland Rehab Equipment
10 Devlan Street
Mansfield
1300 743 710

Buyer's Checklist

This is a decision tool to help you determine if a wheelchair is suitable for you.

1) Answer the following questions:

WHY do you need a wheelchair for mobility? *E.g. I get short of breath when I walk outdoors.*

WHEN will you be using a wheelchair? *E.g. I will be using it to attend my medical appointments.*

HOW OFTEN will you be using a wheelchair? *E.g. Once a week.*

2) What are the optional features required?

Here are the features to consider in a wheelchair and we have categorised them as mandatory or optional. The mandatory features are ones that you must check. Select all the optional features you require before assessing their suitability in the specific wheelchair that you are considering.

	MANDATORY	OPTIONAL	REQUIRED FEATURE?	FEATURE SUITABLE (YES/NO)	COMMENTS
Chair dimensions	✓				To ensure comfort and healthy posture
Anti tip wheels	✓				To prevent wheelchair tipping backwards
Satisfactory when trialled	✓				
Propulsion rim		✓			To allow user to self propel
Can be wheeled around the home, turning all the corners		✓			To give you accessibility around the home
Easy to propel outdoors and on uneven surfaces		✓			To give you greater independence

	MANDATORY	OPTIONAL	REQUIRED FEATURE?	FEATURE SUITABLE (YES/NO)	COMMENTS
Folds up to fit into the boot of your car		✓			To allow portability of the wheelchair when you are travelling in the community
Easy for your helper to propel with you sitting in it indoors		✓			
Easy for your helper to propel with you sitting in it outdoors		✓			
Swing away foot plates		✓			To help with portability and access around the home; to make getting in and out of it easier without needing to step over the footplates
Removable footplates		✓			To further help with portability and access around the home; to make getting in and out of it easier without needing to step over the footplates
Swing away arm rest		✓			To make getting in and out of it easier
Removable arm-rest		✓			To help with portability
Other					
Other					

3) Finally, compare the prices between different suppliers.

Use this table to help you compare prices.

SUITABLE WHEELCHAIR MODEL	PRICE	SHOP	CONTACT PERSON



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