



CHOOSING THE RIGHT

wheelchair for you



We've put together this guide to give you an overview of the more common wheelchair types and what you need to keep in mind when choosing one. Your local dealer will also be able to give you guidance and allow you to try the different types as part of your decision process.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF WHEELCHAIRS

Transit Wheelchairs

Ideally for occasional use and outings, transit wheelchairs are propelled by an attendant. The frame folds and they are easily stored in the back of a vehicle.



Self-Propelling Wheelchairs

With the larger rear wheels, users of these wheelchairs are able to propel themselves for short distances. This more basic style wheelchair is designed for short term use and is a good option if occasional use is required, or as a back up to a powerchair or mobility scooter.

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Fully Optioned Wheelchairs

These types of wheelchairs come in a large number of sizes and offer a large number of adjustments.

There are also numerous accessories available which allow the chair to be customised to the user and their needs. They are generally made of aluminium so are lightweight and easy to propel.



Reclining Wheelchairs



With all the same features as a more optioned wheelchair, this type of chair also offers a reclining backrest, which works well when the user is not able to sit upright, or has the need to sleep in the wheelchair. It is ideal for people recovering from surgery or who have suffered a stroke and need maximum comfort.

FEATURES & FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Self-Propelling or Attendant propelled?

If you are going to be propelling the wheelchair yourself, you will need to look at “self-propelling” wheelchairs which have large rear wheels. They still have push handles at the back so someone else can push you if need be. The larger wheels are easier to use when going up a kerb or over uneven surfaces.

If you do not have the strength to propel yourself and will need help from someone else to push the chair, a “transit” wheelchair is the right option for you. This style of wheelchair has smaller rear wheels and are often more compact and easier to fold and put into a car boot (though it’s common for self-propelling wheelchairs to have “quick release” wheels).

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Wheels

A key part of the wheelchair, the rear wheels will either be pneumatic (air) or solid rubber.

The pneumatic option generally makes a more comfortable ride through better shock absorption, but will need to be pumped up from time to time, and unfortunately can get punctures. Solid tyres are great as they are puncture resistant but make for a slightly firmer ride.

Some self-propelling wheels have a quick release option, which means they can be removed easily. The main advantage of this is for transportation, as it makes the overall size of the wheelchair much smaller.

Anti-tippers

These are small wheels at the rear of the frame which act as a safety feature, preventing the wheelchair from tipping backwards. Generally found on self-propelling wheelchairs, these can be annoying for an attendant pushing the chair; however, they can be removed if this is a problem.

Frequency of use

The amount of time that you will be spending in the wheelchair needs to be considered. If only short lengths of time, a transit type chair will be all that you need. These types of chairs are designed to be convenient and fold easily, though they don't have extra padding and support so can have limited comfort and adjustment. At the other end of the spectrum, if you are going to spend a good part of the day in the wheelchair, look for one that has more features and options so it can be adjusted to "fit" you to ensure you are as comfortable as possible. These chairs also tend to have more padding through the back and seat.

Legrests

Some wheelchairs have legrests that are fixed in place and others have the option of ones that swing out or in. It can make it easier to get into and out of the wheelchair if the legrests are out of the way, making for safe transfers. Swingaway legrests can also be completely removed which can reduce the overall size of the wheelchair when it is being transported or maneuvering through tight hallways (and also make it lighter too).

Armrests

These offer support when someone is seated in the wheelchair, and also make it easier when getting into and out of the wheelchair. Some models of wheelchair have armrests that can be removed or flipped back, which is helpful when the wheelchair user is using a transfer board to side transfer onto a bed, seat, or into the wheelchair.

There are different lengths of armrests – generally classed as “desk” or “full length”. Desk ones allow users to get up close to a table or desk.

Some of the more highly optioned wheelchairs have height adjustable armrests. These are particularly useful when you need to sit on a pressure relief cushion as this adds several centimetres to your seated position, and will ensure that the armrests are at the right height to offer the support you need.

Brakes

All wheelchairs have manual brakes which are positioned on the rear wheels. Some wheelchairs have what is called a hub brake, which allows the attendant to apply the brake from the push handle. This can be really helpful when going down steep hills or ramps and generally gives more control to the attendant. However, the downside with these is that the user cannot apply the brakes themselves.

Product Weight

The weight of the wheelchair can vary significantly depending on what it is made of. Most wheelchairs are constructed of aluminium; however, lower cost wheelchairs are often made of steel as it is a cheaper material. An aluminium wheelchair can weigh as little as 9 kg, whereas a steel wheelchair can weigh up to 20 kg.

User Weight

Wheelchairs all have a maximum user weight. It is never recommended that this is exceeded as it can lead to the wheelchair being unsafe and also will void the warranty on the wheelchair. The normal weight limit for most wheelchairs is around 100 kg but you will find that wider wheelchairs have higher user weight limits.

Seat Size

The size of a wheelchair is determined by the seat size – both by width (between the armrests) and by depth (from the seat back to the front edge of the seat upholstery). It is important that you get the right seat size for you as this will ensure it is the most comfortable for you and will reduce the risk of any pressure areas forming.

The ideal seat width should give you enough room to be comfortable but not be too wide so you are too far away from the armrests, or lean more to one side to feel supported. It shouldn't be too tight as it could cause pressure areas and also keep in mind that you will need to leave room for your winter coat if you are trying the wheelchair when the weather is warmer.

The seat depth also needs to be considered as well. If the seat is too short, your legs will not be fully supported and too much pressure will be put onto your bottom. If it is too long, the back of the seat upholstery will rub on your calves and could cause damage to your skin.

