

Managing posture and pressure relief in wheelchairs



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This leaflet aims to give you general advice about how to relieve pressure and maintain correct posture if you are a wheelchair user. As many users will spend considerable lengths of time in their chair, it is important to avoid pressure sores and stay as comfortable as possible. Your therapist will give you specific recommendations tailored to your individual needs.

Why is pressure relief important for wheelchair users?

Wheelchair users often spend long periods of time sitting or lying in the same position. If not properly managed, this can result in undue pressure on certain areas of the body, which cuts off blood supply and can lead to pressure sores. By using pressure relief techniques, you should be able to avoid experiencing these difficulties, ensuring you are as comfortable as possible.

Excess pressure is often caused by two factors:

1. Uneven weight distribution in the chair, meaning certain areas of skin may be pressed against uncomfortable surfaces
2. Incorrect posture when sitting in the chair

It is therefore important to address both of these issues.



How can I relieve pressure in my wheelchair?

The most crucial factor is to only use wheelchairs that have been prescribed by a healthcare professional for your exact needs. This will ensure that the chair fits you and will reduce the likelihood of pressure issues.

Additionally, there are a number of techniques that can be used to relieve pressure on your body:

1. Try to avoid staying in your wheelchair for more than 3-4 hours at a time.
2. Where possible, re-position frequently to increase blood flow, such as leaning forward and backward or moving from side to side.
3. Ensure you maintain correct posture.
4. Use appropriate cushions. Your therapist will advise you of different options.
5. Look after your skin, moisturising regularly and avoiding skin irritants.
6. Maintain a good level of hygiene, washing frequently, and wearing clean and dry clothes.
7. In certain cases, tilt/recline mechanisms can be built into your wheelchair. As well as being useful for pressure management, tilt mechanisms can also help to prevent sliding down the chair or leaning to one side.

You can read the NICE guidelines on pressure relief and prevention techniques here:

<https://bit.ly/2Wmy2na>

How do I know if my posture is correct or not?

Your therapist will give you detailed postural advice when you first start using your wheelchair, based on your individual requirements. In general, your hips should be centred in the middle of the seat, with your buttocks at the back of the chair. If you have a footplate, ensure it is not too high: your knees should be level with your hips.



How can I get a tilt/recline mechanism in my chair?

Tilt mechanisms are prescribed following a thorough assessment of your needs by your therapist. If you would like to be assessed for this function, please contact your Wheelchair Service to arrange an appointment.



What should I do if I think I am developing a pressure sore or have incorrect posture?

Please contact your local Wheelchair Service as soon as possible to discuss your concerns with your therapist. District Nurses and GPs can also assist with skin management and pressure sores.

If you think you need an extra cushion, or if your chair needs repairing, please contact the Wheelchair Service.