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# Manual Wheelchair

## Purpose

Wheelchairs are designed to allow individuals who either cannot walk or have limited walking ability to be independent and mobile. Always read and abide by all manufacturers' operating instructions. If you have not seen a physician or therapist regarding your wheelchair, we recommend that you do so.

## Types

Manual wheelchairs come in many different shapes, sizes, and brands. Your manual wheelchair may not have all of the features listed below.

Leg rests are add-on extensions that support the lower extremities; they are for support only and are not designed to support the weight of the user. Leg rests come in three basic types, fixed, swing-away and elevating.

*Fixed* leg rests are permanently attached to the frame of the wheelchair. Fixed leg rests are designed for users that use their wheelchair infrequently. *Swing-away* leg rests attach to the wheelchair frame and can detach and swing away; this swing-away action facilitates transfers into and out of the wheelchair and allows for a more compact size when transporting. *Elevating* leg rests can elevate the position of the lower extremity; this feature is provided for users that cannot bend at the knee or must elevate the leg. Swing-away and elevating leg rests will completely detach from the wheelchair frame.

Armrests are designed to provide a resting place for the upper extremities and are not designed to support the full weight of the wheelchair user. Armrests can be fixed or detachable and come in two different lengths; full length or a shorter desk length.

All wheelchairs have a maximum weight limit that they can support. It is important to understand the weight capacity of your wheelchair:

Weight of user (stated by user) is \_\_\_\_\_ pounds.  
Maximum weight capacity of wheelchair is \_\_\_\_\_ pounds.

## Use

Each wheelchair has different features and characteristics and each user is responsible for understanding the operation of the wheelchair provided. Always read and understand the manufacturer's Owner's Manual before operating your wheelchair. Individual wheelchair users often develop skills to deal with daily living activities that may differ from those described in this document.

If your wheelchair has a seat positioning strap, wear it every time the wheelchair is used. The seat positioning strap is not designed for use as a restraining device. When the seat position strap shows signs of wear, it must be replaced immediately.

## **Use (Continued)**

In order to make sure your wheelchair remains stable, do not lean forward out of the wheelchair any further than the length of the armrests. Always engage the wheel locks or other braking devices before transferring in or out of the wheelchair. Users and care providers should also take every effort to reduce the distance between the wheelchair and transferred surface.

Wheel locks are not intended to be used as brakes. They are designed to provide resistance so the average user will not move when they are applied. To activate the wheel locks, push forward (or pull back) on the lock tips until the locks fully engage into the locked position. Wheel locks should be regularly checked and adjusted for proper function.

All leg rests have flip-up footplates. These footplates must always be flipped up and out of the way when transferring into and out of the wheelchair. Some manual wheelchairs come with anti-tipping devices attached. These are devices designed to help prevent backward tipping of the wheelchair and should always be in place.

Ensure that all driving surfaces, including any ramps and lifts can support the combined weight of the wheelchair and the user. When shifting weight or changing sitting position in the manual wheelchair, always make sure your movement is in the same direction as the movement of the wheelchair. Shifting your weight in the opposite direction may cause the wheelchair to tip over.

In order to collapse and fold-up the wheelchair, lift up on the center of the seat upholstery. To unfold, tilt the wheelchair slightly (to take pressure off one wheel), then press down on the seat rails. To prevent pinching fingers, be careful not to get your fingers between the seat rail guides and armrests.

## **Accessories**

Manual wheelchairs are bulky and can be heavy to lift and transport. There are many models of wheelchair lifts that can be purchased that attach to most vehicles. These lift devices simplify the transportation of your wheelchair. Ask your medical wheelchair provider about the different models available to accommodate your needs.

Cushions are designed for individuals who spend many hours in their wheelchairs and need to prevent skin breakdown. Cushions can provide support and stability for the user. Cushions should be purchased from a professional medical supplier that can properly fit the user. Ask your medical wheelchair provider about the different models available to accommodate your needs.

## Safety

The safe use of a manual wheelchair requires it to be used as instructed, which includes the following safety precautions:

- Always wear your seat positioning strap when in the wheelchair.
- Do not operate the wheelchair on roads, streets, or highways.
- Do not use your wheelchair unless it has proper tire pressure.
- Use only parts, accessories, or adapters authorized by the wheelchair manufacturer.
- Do not stand on the frame of the wheelchair.
- Do not stand on the leg rests or footboard.
- Never add, remove, or disable any feature, part, or function of your wheelchair.
- Never carry passengers on your wheelchair.

In order to ensure care provider and operator safety, make sure you follow these safety guidelines:

- Use nightlights to increase vision around areas of use.
- Wipe up any water or slippery floor spills.
- Remove tripping hazards (loose floorboards, uneven floors, throw rugs, extension cords, clutter, etc.)
- Install grab bars, use bath mats with suction cups, and use an elevated toilet seat to prevent falls.
- Do not use the wheelchair when taking any medications that may cause dizziness, drowsiness, and/or unsteadiness.

For additional home safety measures, see the Fall Prevention at Home patient instruction sheet.

## Maintenance

Manual wheelchairs, like automobiles, must never be abused. Proper maintenance of your wheelchair will allow for many years of enjoyable and safe use.

If you have pneumatic tires, check the air pressure monthly. Do not overinflate the tires. It is not recommended to inflate tires with a high-pressure system like those found at gas stations; these systems can rapidly overinflate tires and may cause the tire to explode and cause bodily harm. Always replace worn or damaged tires.

Never leave your manual wheelchair outside in adverse weather conditions. Always store your manual wheelchair in a dry place. Your wheelchair manufacturer will have specific inspections and maintenances listed in their Operator's Manual; make sure you understand and follow these recommendations.