

Using a Wheelchair Safely

A wheelchair is a great mobility device for getting around. Like any equipment, they have wear and tear. You will need to service your wheelchair to keep it in good working condition. This helps keep your wheelchair safe and prevents problems before they occur. In case of an emergency, it's good practice to carry a cell phone with you.



How to maintain your wheelchair

Servicing your wheelchair on a regular basis is a good way to prevent problems. Here are a few things you can do to keep your wheelchair working well.

- Keep tires properly inflated at all times. This makes it safer and easier to use.
- If you have an air cushion, check it often to make sure it is properly inflated. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials ROHO Cushions](#) handout.
- Watch for caster flutter. This is when the front wheels (casters) make rapid movements at high speeds. If this is occurring, your casters may need to be fixed.
- If using a manual wheelchair, keep an eye on your brakes. They may need to be adjusted as your tire tread wears.
- Don't let children play with your wheelchair. It is not a toy.

Watch for obstacles

- Be aware of your surroundings and small obstacles on the ground.
- Be careful when moving through rain or snow. Wheels may slip when wet.
- Be extra careful on slopes and uneven surfaces.
- Avoid steep slopes.

When using a wheelchair, relieve pressure throughout the day. Do this by leaning or doing 'push-ups'. This helps prevent pressure sores. To learn more, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials Pressure Relief Techniques](#) handout.

Contact your Doctor or Nurse for more information.

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Manual wheelchairs

- Don't put heavy loads on the back of your wheelchair. This can cause your chair to tip backwards.
- Be careful when pulling on doors or other objects. You may tip over backwards if it releases or moves.
- Keep anti-tippers on until you and your therapist agree it is safe to remove them.
- Using a manual wheelchair puts you at risk for overuse injuries in your arms and shoulders. Give your shoulders breaks when they need them. Don't overdo it. Stretch your shoulders often to help keep them healthy.



Power wheelchairs

- Always turn your power wheelchair off before transferring.
- Use a flag, headlights, and/or taillights if you are driving on the streets.
- Make sure your batteries are fully charged before going out.
- Know how to put your chair into manual mode. You might need to instruct others how to move your chair.

Pay attention to your posture in your wheelchair. Proper seating is important to maintain good posture and prevent pressure areas.

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