

Neuromuscular Clinic

At

The University of Utah
Department of Neurology

Wheelchair Assessment

A wheelchair is a tool to help you maintain, and improve, your independence and comfort. Taking advantage of technology can enhance quality of life!

Wheel Chair Considerations

It is important to consider the following issues when ordering a manual or power wheelchair. The needs of an ALS patient may differ from the wheelchair needs of other patients and not all vendors may be aware of these issues. This handout outlines some of the important issues.

What is the Best Wheelchair to Have?

Most patients benefit from two wheelchairs, a manual one and power one.

- A manual chair can be kept in the trunk of the car and used anywhere. This provides a high level of independence.
- A power wheelchair enables you to move on your own but requires consideration for the home environment. Try to arrange a demonstration of a power wheelchair in your home for maneuvering down hallways, through doors and in the bathroom. Ramps are necessary to in and out of the house. Power wheelchairs are very heavy and require special considerations and for transporting them in your motor vehicle.

It is important to look to future needs with a wheelchair. A regular power wheelchair is better for an ALS patient than a scooter. For example, a wheelchair with a high back is important should there be need to rest ones head. The ability to relieve pressures and change position can be accomplished with “tilt in space” feature (tipping back) and “reclining” feature (stretch out). Although these features increase the expense we feel they are necessary. These features require a heavy-duty wheelchair frame.

Important Considerations

- Patient Physical Considerations
 - 1) Size of the wheel chair:
 - a. Width
 - b. Seat height
 - c. Arm rest height
 - d. Back height
 - 2) Features needed now:
 - a. Foot rests
 - b. Special cushion

- 3) Features needed in the future:
 - a. High back
 - b. Provisions for head rest
 - c. Ability to tip back (tilt-in-space)
 - d. Ability to stretch out
- Home Physical Considerations
 - 1) Size of the home – need to measure!
 - a. Width of door frames
 - b. Room to turn around
 - c. Access to bathroom
 - 2) To and from the home
 - a. Ramps to front or back door
 - b. Access to garage
 - c. Access to yard, drive way, side walk
- Transportation Considerations
 - 1) Sedan or van passenger vehicle:
 - a. Seat height and transfers
 - b. Access to trunk (manual wheel chair)
 - 2) Modified van:
 - a. Roof height
 - b. Lift or ramps
- Insurance Considerations
 - 1) Financing:
 - a. Manual wheel chairs cost \$2,000-3,000
 - Finance through MDA
 - b. Power wheel chairs cost \$10,000-20,000+
 - Finance through insurance (private or Medicare)
 - 2) Time to complete order
 - a. Manual wheel chair = several weeks
 - b. Power wheel chair = several months

It is preferable to be fully evaluated by a Physical Therapist along with the wheelchair vendor. This can be arranged through the Motor Neuron Disease Clinic or with your local vendor.