



What you should know about....

Assisting a Wheelchair User

A practical guide to helping a wheelchair user –
HSP 25B

Improving Mobility

Wheelchairs are often used by people who have restricted mobility as an aid to getting around and improving quality of life. They can help in:

- Promoting independence
- Moving around the home
- Going out for social interests
- Enjoying gardens and outdoors
- Engaging in other pursuits.

Please note

This booklet is designed for general guidance in assisting a wheelchair user. It is important to follow the specific instructions of qualified trainers, physiotherapists or the wheelchair manufacturers.

You may cause an injury if you don't use the proper techniques.

How can you assist?

Someone using a wheelchair may need your help from time to time. There are a number of situations where you may need to give assistance, including:

- Getting into or out of a vehicle
- Going up or down a step or kerb
- Getting across uneven ground
- Getting up or down slopes or gradients
- Getting in and out of buildings.

Remember wheelchair users are generally very independent and the fact a person uses a wheelchair does not necessarily mean they need assistance.



Think and Communicate

How can you be of assistance? It really depends on what the user's needs are, so talk to them! Make sure you find out about the type of wheelchair they use, as there are a wide range available.

Think sensitively!

- Always treat the person with respect.
- It is particularly good to position yourself at the same eye level when conversing together.
- Remember they will also not be able to see you, as you will be behind them and out of view.
- It's good to talk through what you are going to do before you do it.
- One of key things to think about is their sight level which will be lower than yours. Try to view things from their perspective.

Think also about your capabilities.

- Are you strong enough for the task?
- Is the combined weight of the person and the wheelchair going to be too much for you?
- Would it be sensible to ask someone else to assist you as well?
- Do you have any health problems that might be affected by helping?

Ask first.

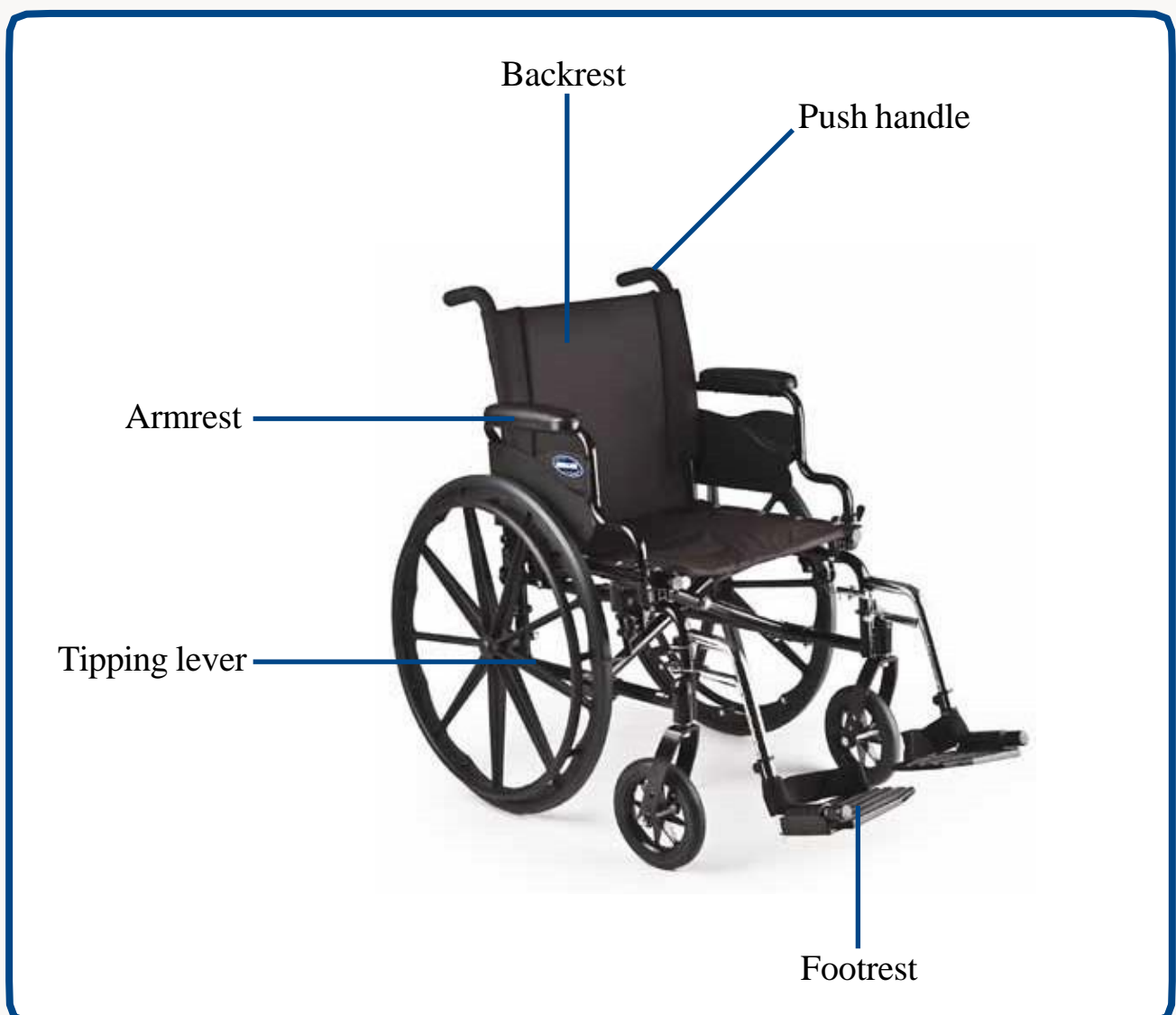
Usually a wheelchair user will know exactly how they want to be helped so ask first.



What do you need to know about wheelchairs?

It's useful to have a good understanding of how a wheelchair works and to consider some other important aspects, such as:

- How much experience does the user have with that type of wheelchair?
- Is it the right size and type for the user and the requirement?
- Do they fit well and is it comfortable?
- Is it in good working order with nothing broken?
- Are any straps properly secured?
- Does the brake work and are the tyres correctly inflated?
- Do the footrests work and adjust properly?



Using the Wheelchair

It's important to make sure the user is comfortable and safe in the wheelchair. Check the following:

Positioning

- Make sure they fit well, and arms and legs are well placed to prevent possible injury.
- Ensure any clothing or blankets are not overhanging, where they could get trapped in the wheels.

Footrests

- The footrests are important for comfort, support and safety.
- Ensure they are moved out of the way for getting in and out of the wheelchair. Then move back into place one at a time and allow/assist the user to place their feet on them securely.
- Don't let the person stand on the footrests as this is likely to cause the wheelchair to tip forwards. Make sure their feet cannot get trapped by the front wheels.

Baggage

- Take care with any bags, particularly if they are heavy and ensure they are not hung on the back of the wheelchair, as this could cause it to tip up as the user is trying to get out.



Awareness

- It's easy to get distracted while you are concentrating on helping someone in a wheelchair. Remember to be aware of what is happening around you, such as uneven surfaces, pedestrians, cyclists or other traffic.



Handling and storing a wheelchair

The actual the design of wheelchair will vary but here are some useful tips.

Unfolding

- Place the wheelchair in front of you. Push the seat down carefully with the flat of your hands keeping your fingers carefully away from the edges.
- Once the wheelchair is fully open, check it is firmly secured and put in the seat cushion.

Folding

- First check the footrests, turn them outwards or remove as required. Take out the cushion.
- Stand to one side of the wheelchair. Grip the front and back of the seat and lift up carefully. Be careful not to trap your fingers.

Storing

- Often you may need to place the wheelchair in the boot of a car. First, remove any loose parts then ensure the wheelchair is fully folded and the brake is on.
- Grip it tightly, bend your knees with your back straight and lift carefully into the boot. Again watch your fingers.



Transferring to or from the wheelchair

You may be asked to help transfer a person between the wheelchair and another place such as a vehicle, bed or static chair.

Things to think about

How much assistance is required? Can you manage on your own or do you need to get someone else to help?

What about using handling aids?

It's best to get advice on using these from a qualified person, as there is potential for injury if used incorrectly. There are a number of different types available such as:

- **Turning discs** - for swiveling easily while in a car seat, this makes it easier to get in and out. These can be used to help a person turn when standing.
- **Slide sheets** - are made of slippery material, which eases sliding from the wheelchair to another seat.
- **Sliding boards** - similar in use to slide sheets, they ease the transfer between the wheelchair and another seat.
- **Handling belts** - worn around the waist with handles by the wheelchair user, they give a point of grip for the helper to assist (NOT lift) the user.



Getting in and out of a car

It can be difficult for a wheelchair user to get in or out of a car and they may require some assistance from you. A sliding board can make it an easier task.

Getting into a car

- Check the levels - ensure the car and wheelchair are at the same level.
- Open the car door as wide as possible and slide the car seat back as far as possible.
- Move the wheelchair's footrests out of the way, position the wheelchair next to the car seat and put the wheelchair brakes on.
- If using a slide board remove the armrest closest to the car, get the person to lean back while you push the board under the hips and rest the other end on the car seat.
- Help the person to slide or shuffle along the board and into the seat.
- Remove the board, help them adjust the seat, put on their seatbelt, and ensure they are comfortable.

Getting out of a car

- To help them getting out of the car simply follow the reverse of this procedure.

Three tips to help transferring a wheelchair user:

- Put the brake on and move the footrests clear of the person's feet.
- Hold the wheelchair steady so the person can move to a ready position and then stand up if possible.
- Help them balance and when ready move to their intended position.



Helping the wheelchair user to get mobile

Remember you have two aims when helping a wheelchair user to get around:

1. To ensure they are safe and comfortable at all times.
2. To ensure you are safe and do not injure yourself.

Using the brakes

- Make sure they work properly before starting out.
- Use them when stopped and waiting, helping the person in or out, and when parking the wheelchair.

Securing the person

- Make sure they are ready and in the correct position, sitting back before you start to move.
- Check their requirements first and ask for their preferred moving methods, for example do they prefer to go forwards or backwards down a kerb or through doorways.
- If using wheelchair outside, we recommend using a lap safety belt.

Moving around

Never tip the wheelchair forward

- **Make sure you grip the wheelchair handles firmly with both hands.**
- **Move slowly and avoid sudden turns or jolts.**
- **If tipping back, for example to get up a kerb, be careful not to overbalance and tip too far.**
- **If the wheelchair gets stuck, don't force it. Check what is stopping it.**

Take care of your posture:

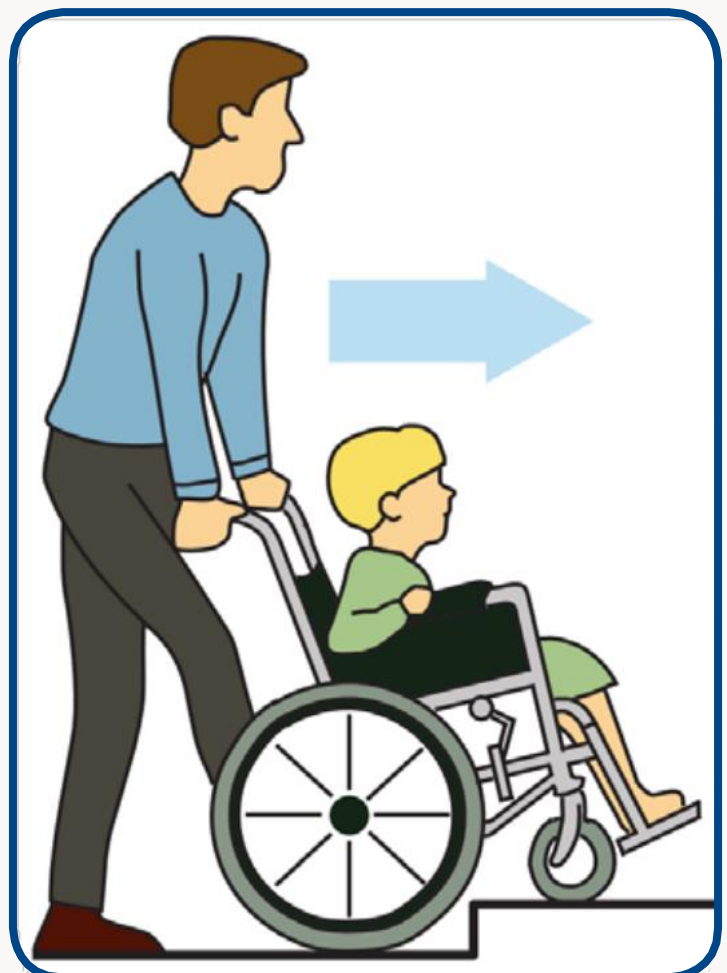
- **Ensure you avoid straining your back and shoulders.**
- **Keep your back upright, with elbows bent and avoid stooping.**
- **Stay close to the wheelchair but sufficiently far so your knees or feet don't catch on it.**

Managing kerbs and small steps

- When you are assisting a wheelchair user you may realise just how many small steps and kerbs there are, which you normally take for granted.
- Trying to manoeuvre these can be dangerous, so look to see if there is a ramp nearby.
- Look at the kerb first of all - is there a drop kerb nearby?
- Check with the user to see if they are happy to go up or down a kerb or small step, and whether they would prefer to go forwards or backwards.

Going up a kerb

- Position the wheelchair with the front wheels close to the kerb.
- Let the person know what you are going to do.
- Grip the handles firmly and place one foot on the tipping lever.
- Push down on the lever and pull the handles toward you until you have it balanced on the back wheels.
- Push it forward until the front wheels are well over the pavement, lower the front wheels and roll the wheelchair forwards, taking care not to lift the rear wheels off the ground.




Managing kerbs and small steps

Going down a kerb

- Ensure the wheelchair is square on to the kerb edge.
- Place one foot on the tipping lever, holding the handles firmly.
- Gain a careful balance of the wheelchair on the back wheels and roll forwards gently. Take care not to overbalance.
- Roll the back wheels down the kerb, keeping the wheelchair tilted back, take care as you will be taking a lot of weight yourself at this point.
- Once the rear wheels touch the ground, ease the wheelchair forward gently until the front wheels also touch the ground.

Going down a kerb backwards

- Sometimes it can be easier to do this procedure backwards or the user may prefer it.
- Take care to check for traffic before you start and before turning to cross, as you will usually have your back to the road.


Never tip a wheelchair forward when going down a kerb.



Looking after a wheelchair

! Don't try to repair a wheelchair yourself.

- The wheelchair manufacturer will give you a user manual or maintenance instructions which you should always refer to.
- Please report any faults to the homes Maintenance Manager - do not use faulty wheelchairs.

Safety check

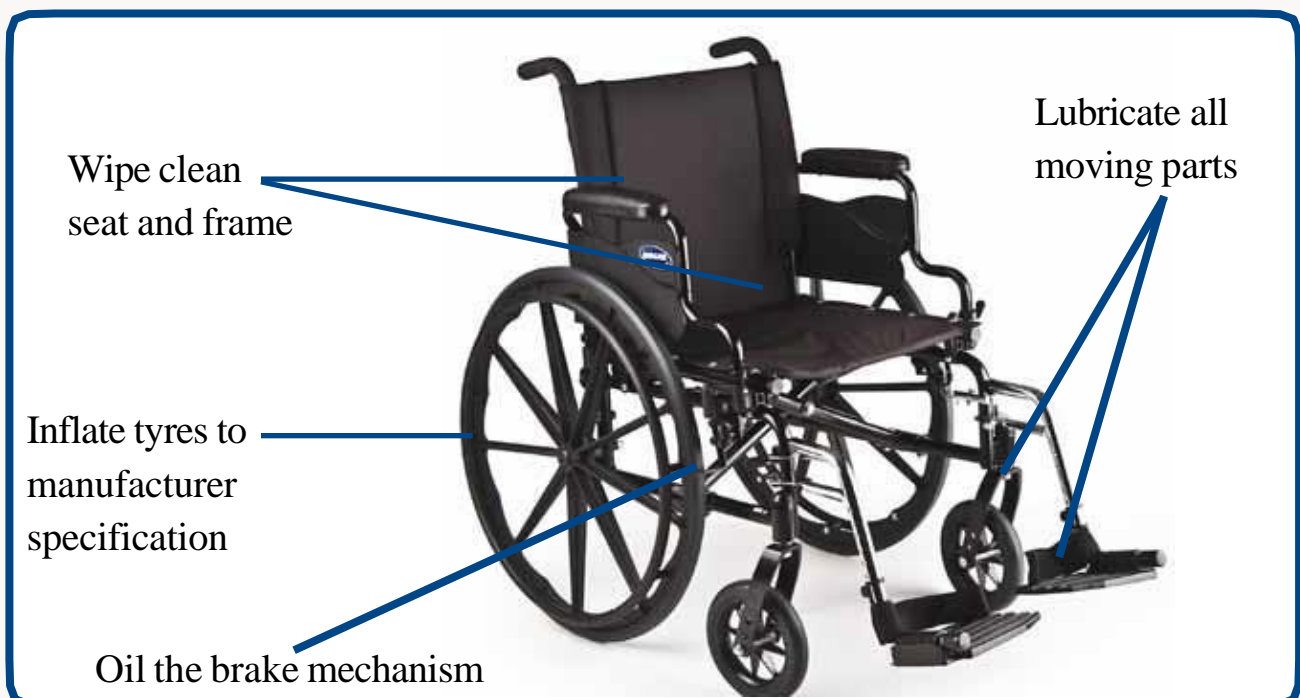
- It is a good idea to keep a regular check on the condition of the wheelchair and check that everything works.

Maintenance

- Refer to the instructions on oiling the brakes, keeping the tyres inflated to the required level, and greasing any moving parts as appropriate.

Cleaning


- It is a good idea to clean the wheel chair regularly, wiping off as much mud and dirt, and particularly making sure it is dry before storing. If you put it away wet, mould may grow on it.
- When cleaning, check the manufacturer's instructions for guidance on best materials to use, if unsure use warm soapy water to clean the seat and frame.



Types of wheelchairs

Wheelchairs are designed for a variety of uses and environments. Some things to look out for are :-

- Indoor use only – these are typically designed to be more manoeuvrable but unstable for outdoor use. Wheelchairs with large wheels at front are often this type.
- Crash tested wheelchairs – suitable for residents to be transported in the wheelchair within minibus or hospital transport. Often marked with either

carabiner 

or crash test symbol.



Getting further help and guidance

There are lots of sources of information for help in maintaining a wheelchair, using it, or helping someone else to use one. Try the following:

- HSP 25 – Wheelchairs & Scoters
- Local mobility or wheelchair services.
- Local occupational therapy service.
- Physiotherapists.

Helping a wheelchair user can be a rewarding experience for both of you. Think safely and sensitively.

