

How to Use a Wheelchair: A Step-by-Step Guide

Whether you're using a wheelchair temporarily or long-term, knowing how to operate it safely and efficiently can help you stay mobile and independent.

1. Choosing the Right Wheelchair

- **Type:** Choose between manual (self-propelled or transport) or powered wheelchairs based on your mobility and strength.
 - **Fit:** Ensure the seat width, depth, and height are appropriate for your body size.
 - **Support:** Check that footrests, armrests, and back support meet your comfort and posture needs.
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2. Sitting in the Wheelchair

- **Make sure the brakes are engaged before sitting.**
 - **Position the wheelchair close to the seat or bed.**
 - **Use armrests and seat for support as you transfer in.**
 - **Ensure feet are on the footrests after sitting.**
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3. Moving Forward and Backward (Manual Wheelchair)

- **Forward:** Push both wheels forward evenly using the hand rims.
 - **Backward:** Pull both wheels back evenly using the hand rims.
 - **Maintain straight posture and look ahead.**
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4. Turning (Manual Wheelchair)

- **To turn right:** Push the left wheel forward while holding the right wheel still.
 - **To turn left:** Push the right wheel forward while holding the left wheel still.
 - **Tight turns:** Pull one wheel backward while pushing the other forward.
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5. Navigating Curbs and Ramps

- **Curbs:** Use curb ramps when available. Get assistance for high curbs.
- **Ramps:** Approach straight on and maintain a steady pace. Use anti-tippers if needed.

6. Using the Brakes

- Always engage brakes before getting in or out.
- Use brakes when stationary, especially on sloped surfaces.
- Regularly check that brakes are functioning properly.

7. Transferring Out of the Wheelchair

- Position close to the transfer surface.
- Lock brakes and move footrests aside.
- Use armrests or a transfer board if needed.

8. Tips for Safe Use

- Keep pathways clear of obstacles.
- Check tire pressure and hardware regularly.
- Use gloves for propulsion to protect hands.
- Avoid steep inclines and uneven surfaces without assistance.

Important

Consult with a physical therapist or mobility specialist to ensure your wheelchair fits properly and that you're trained in safe techniques for transfers and movement.