



WHITE PAPER

An Occupational Therapist's Guide to Wheelchairs

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Introduction

You may find, especially as you grow older, that walking becomes more difficult or even impossible due to illness, injury, or some other form of disability. People often feel that the lack of mobility may compromise their quality of life. A wheelchair, however, can help restore mobility and even improve your quality of life.

Whether you're looking to purchase a new device or you're a first-time wheelchair user, selecting the right mobility solution for you is vital. Doing so can be a daunting task, but here at Independent Living Specialists, we have the knowledge, experience, and top quality products to ensure that you feel fully confident in your purchasing decision.

How to Choose the Right Wheelchair

Personal needs

If you are seeking a wheelchair for yourself or a loved one, selecting the right wheelchair based on physical needs, lifestyle, and body type is critical. People are no longer confined to wheelchairs; rather, wheelchairs liberate users by providing them with the ability to move easily, travel, and live more independently.

When it comes to selecting a wheelchair, it's vital to gain a holistic understanding of the reasons why a wheelchair is required. There are a number of key factors to take into account, first and foremost:

- A person's physical dimensions – This is a vital consideration to make to ensure that the chair matches the user's physical needs. Your dimensions will determine the type of chair you are best suited to, as well as its size and features.
- Intended use – It's essential to decide on how many hours a day the user is expected to be sat in the chair to identify a suitable chair to minimise the risk of pressure injury. Those who intend to use the device for extended periods are at higher risk of pressure-related injuries. People in this category are more suited to chairs that can be adjusted to add specific pressure relief cushions.
- Level of support – The requirements of a person able to propel themselves differ significantly to those of an individual who require assistance from another person.

Medical needs

Identifying any medical needs and health concerns is an important step to take in your purchasing decision. Essentially, you need to know how a chair can accommodate your medical needs if and when required.

Common health issues experienced by many of our clients looking to purchase a wheelchair are related to musculoskeletal disorders, including arthritis. Often arthritis impedes a person's ability to walk or tolerate



longer walking distances. In these cases, a wheelchair can alleviate the need to be walking, offering an ideal mobility solution. However, arthritis can also carry associated pains with sitting for long periods.

Fortunately, for those at higher risk of developing pressure pains while seated in a wheelchair, there is the available option to add a pressure relief cushion to prevent any injury. With this in mind, if you are intending to use your chair for extended periods, incorporating the extra support of a pressure relief cushion with your wheelchair is potentially the best alternative. Certain wheelchairs are better designed to accommodate the addition of a pressure cushion. Our staff at ILS can help you with identifying suitable chairs for this option.

At ILS, our purpose is to provide you with the mobility solutions you need to enable you to live as happily and independently as possible. With our Occupational Therapists on hand, we can advise you on selecting a chair compatible with your medical needs.

Other points to consider

It's also important to take into consideration your lifestyle and whether you intend to use your wheelchair indoors, outdoors or both.

- Lifestyle – This includes factors such as daily activities, travel, and support requirements. For example, a person looking for a chair to cater for their living needs around the house would need a different chair to somebody who plays a lot





of sports. How far do you plan to travel in your wheelchair? Do you frequently travel independently or with other people? These are vital questions to ask, and the answers should play a big part in your purchasing decision.

- Surroundings – With so many wheelchairs to choose from on the market today, understanding the suitability of a chair in changing surroundings is crucial in helping you to make the right decision. Different types of wheelchairs are designed to perform optimally in varying conditions, and some chairs are more suited to certain surroundings.

Indoor versus outdoor usage is perhaps the most important factor in regards to surroundings to consider. Fortunately, wheelchairs are available for those looking to find a chair suited for both indoor and outdoor usage. If you are looking to use your wheelchair indoors on flatter surfaces mainly, a chair with smaller front castor wheels is an appropriate option. Conversely, to ensure stability and ease of movement on more uneven terrain, a wheelchair with larger front wheels would be more suited to outdoor use.

Maneuverability and navigation – whether it's around tight corners or small spaces – are further vital points to consider when looking at the wheelchair options available.

Understanding the Features of a Wheelchair

The key to selecting the right wheelchair for you is to find a wheelchair with features and capabilities that align with your personal needs. ILS offers a wide selection of high-quality wheelchairs with different designs and features to cater to the varying needs of each individual. Certain chairs provide greater adjustability, allowing the option to alter the seat height and depth, as well as the height of the armrests and length of the leg rests.

Essentially every wheelchair does the same job; however, each chair has different functionalities to cater to the varying needs of different individuals. Because of this, it's vital to align the needs of a person with the capabilities of a wheelchair. This is why an understanding of the dimensions and adjustability of the wheelchairs play an essential factor in your purchasing decision.

In regards to the seat itself, the key features to consider are:

- Seat height – To align with the user's ability to transfer in and out of the wheelchair.
- Seat width – To accommodate the user's hip-width and ensure comfort.
- Seat depth – To ensure that the user can sit as far



back on the seat as possible to guarantee support from the seat cushion.

More generally, other key features to observe are:

- Weight – It's important to consider the weight of the wheelchair and your lifting capabilities to eliminate transportation and storage problems. Consideration should also be if a wheelchair has quick release wheels as this aids storage and transportation.
- Backrests – Backrests are a central feature of a wheelchair both in terms of comfort and support. Different models feature different backrests varying in type and adjustability. With some of the chairs available at ILS, there's the option to remove the standard backrest and add scripted or customisable backrests to ensure the correct level of postural support is provided.



- Tyre – Deciding on the type of tyre you would like your wheelchair to have is dependent on your experience and comfort as to what you prefer. There are two main types of tyre – plastic and pneumatic.
 - Plastic – Plastic is the material used for general types of tyre. Plastic tyres are low-maintenance and puncture-proof.
 - Pneumatic – A pneumatic tyre is an air-filled tyre. This type of tyre is more high-maintenance, requiring air pressure monitoring and repair when flat. However pneumatic tyres are lighter than solid plastic tyres and should be considered in this light.
- Crash testing – A selection of our models are engineered from the manufacturer to be made to standards to be crash tested. Crash tested

wheelchairs allow a person to remain seated in the chair when being transported into an accessible vehicle with the additional security of a seatbelt. If you are looking to find a chair suitable for long term use, offering adaptability to allow for extra transportation support, a crash tested model would be an appropriate option.

- Safe-working load – Safe-working load is the guideline of the weight that the wheelchair can safely transport. Adhering to the safe working load of a chair is vital for several reasons including safety, stability, and maximising the durability of the device.

Types of Wheelchairs

It's also necessary to determine the type of wheelchair that best aligns with your needs. There are two main types of wheelchair – Self-propelled and Transit. A Self-propelled wheelchair is a self-reliant device that requires the user to control and activate the movement. Conversely, a Transit chair is propelled by another person. Deciding on the type of wheelchair you need will be a key contributor in directing you towards the right mobility solution for you.

Standing and Powered wheelchairs are also available options. A powered wheelchair uses a battery-powered electric motor for propulsion. Motorized wheelchairs are the best choice for users who can not operate a manual wheelchair or for users who suffer from



emphysema or cardiac issues. Powered wheelchairs are also an ideal solution for users who travel extensively or over long distances. Some powered wheelchairs are also built with specialised wheels or suspension to handle uneven terrains such as uneven terrains and steeper inclines.

Standing wheelchairs are powered chairs that will assist the user to move into a standing position. They can help to improve circulation, relieve back pain or relieve pressure on the kidneys. They can also help the user to move into a standing position for work or to make it easier to complete household tasks and potentially avoid costly home modifications.

Unique ILS Experience

We are here to support you throughout your entire journey towards achieving increased mobility. At all of our ILS Showrooms, we have highly trained staff with the knowledge and experience to help you find the right chair for you. Our expert guidance doesn't stop there – we also have Occupational and Physio Therapists on hand to offer a more clinically minded approach.

Occupational Therapists are experts in helping clients achieve maximum independence in their daily lives.

The Occupational Therapists at ILS can help you to assess your goals, body structure, activities, environment, medical conditions and other factors to choose the ideal wheelchair.

So how does our Occupational and Physio Therapist service work? Upon referral, we'll get in touch and visit you to find out precisely what your personal needs are. From there, we work with you and provide further in-depth advice and guidance to align you with the most suitable chair for you.

Often as part of our visit, we will bring trial products for you to test, and we can even leave the device with you for a short time to allow you to really get a good idea as to whether the chair is the right fit for you and your lifestyle.

Following our visit and trial period, if for whatever reason you have been unable to find a chair that you're happy with, we offer a further service – ILS Rehab. Our staff at ILS Rehab can provide scripted customised seated solutions built specifically to match your dimensions and needs.





Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✗
Brakes	✓
Seat width	Not adjustable
Seat height	Not adjustable
Seat depth	Not adjustable
Tyres	Puncture-proof as standard
Back rest	Standard not adjustable
Cushion	Not provided as standard
Swing away armrests	✓
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	✗
Crash tested	✗

Drive Medical Ultra Lightweight Portable Wheelchair Plus Carry Bag

The Drive Medical Ultra Lightweight Portable Wheelchair is an example of a cost-effective, lightweight mobility solution for the more able-bodied user with a low number of seating needs or concerns.

Weighing less than 10kg this is an extremely lightweight, transport wheelchair. It is perfect for shopping trips, social occasions, doctor visits or anywhere where lightweight portability is a necessity. The wheelchair folds up easily and fits into a compact carrying bag, making it easy to store, place in the trunk of a car, and it can even be checked in as luggage at the airport.

In terms of adjustability, customisable features of this wheelchair are limited, and changes can only be made to the length of the footplates. This does allow suitable usage for both shorter and taller people.



Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✓
Brakes	✓
Seat width	Standard not adjustable
Seat height	Not adjustable
Seat depth	Standard
Tyres	Puncture-proof as standard
Back rest	Standard not adjustable
Cushion	Not provided as standard
Swing away armrests	✗
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	✗
Crash tested	✗

Days Healthcare Swift Wheelchair Lite

The Days Healthcare Swift Wheelchair Lite is a lightweight, practical wheelchair designed to be an ideal occasional use chair for both inside and outside use. It is intended to be user-friendly and offers a compact design which makes it ideal for tight spaces where manoeuvrability is required.

This chair also folds easily to permit easy transport or storage. In addition, the Days Swift Wheelchair offers solid, no maintenance tires, swing away and removable leg rests and easy to use reliable brakes.



Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✓
Brakes	✓
Seat width	Standard not adjustable
Seat height	Not adjustable
Seat depth	Standard
Tyres	Puncture-proof as standard
Back rest	Standard not adjustable
Cushion	Not provided as standard
Swing away armrests	✗
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	✓
Crash tested	✗

Omega Lite Transit Wheelchair

For extreme lightweight versatility, the Omega Lite Wheelchair is your ideal choice. The chair boasts an extremely lightweight aluminium frame, with swing-away removable footrests and a fold-down backrest.

The Omega Lite can also be folded down quickly and easily for travel and storage. In addition, the wheelchair boasts a padded seat, easy to operate swing-away leg rests and a handy rear storage pocket.



Sunrise Medical Breezy BasiX 2 Folding Wheelchair

Flexibility and adjustability are guaranteed with the Sunrise Medical Breezy BasiX 2 Folding Wheelchair. This wheelchair is a durable, lightweight, manual chair, specially designed with caregivers and users in mind. The wheelchair can be folded, and the wheels can be removed for easy storage or to be transported in the trunk of your car.

The chair is also incredibly versatile, making it an ideal solution if you are likely to be using the chair for an extended period. A key feature to note is the seat height adjustment which permits foot propulsion or the ability to be pushed by a caregiver or attendant. The armrests can also be flipped back, enabling users to transfer quickly and easily out of the chair.

In regards to replacement parts and accessories, the Breezy BasiX 2 has a range of options and can be outfitted with a variety of features to increase comfort and safety. As a standard accessory, this chair is provided alongside a low-profile foam cushion; however, if required, a high-pressure relief cushion can be added.

Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✓
Brakes	Options available
Seat width	Options (14 - 20 inches)
Seat height	Adjustable
Seat depth	Adjustable
Tyres	Options available
Back rest	Options available
Cushion	Low profile comfort foam provided as standard
Swing away armrests	Yes standard (height adjustable as optional extra)
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	Options available
Crash tested	✗



Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✓
Brakes	✓
Seat width	Options (16 and 18 inches)
Seat height	Not adjustable
Seat depth	Standard
Tyres	Puncture-proof as standard
Back rest	Standard not adjustable
Cushion	✗
Swing away armrests	✗
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	Standard
Crash tested	✓

Karma Ergo Lite Deluxe Wheelchair

The Karma Ergo Lite Deluxe Wheelchair is the lightest wheelchair available at ILS and is designed for the more able-bodied, active user. With its ultra-lightweight, this chair is easy to manoeuvre and transport.

The wheelchair features the S-Ergo seating system which prevents the occupant from slipping and provides basic pressure relief. The chair also offers an Aegis microbe shield permanently bonded to the fabric, which makes the chair durable and hygienic. The backrests also fold down for transportation and storage.

The Karma Ergo Lite Deluxe Wheelchair can also be outfitted with additional features such as a wheelchair seat belt for added safety, a universal wheelchair tray and armrest covers.



Transit	✓
Self-propelled	✓
Brakes	✓
Seat width	Not adjustable
Seat height	Not adjustable
Seat depth	Standard
Tyres	Puncture-proof as standard
Back rest	Standard not adjustable
Cushion	✗
Swing away armrests	✓
Swing away legrests	✓
Attendant hand brakes	Available on transit option
Crash tested	

Days Healthcare Swift Wheelchair

Our Days Healthcare Swift Wheelchair is a cost-effective, lightweight, compact mobility solution. With its design and features, this chair is more suited to short usage times. The wheelchair is a perfect occasional use chair for both indoor and outdoor use.

The Days Healthcare Swift Wheelchair also offers no maintenance solid tires, swing away removable leg rests and a folding backrest. The wheels can also be removed for easy storage and transport.

Why Choose Independent Living Specialists

When it comes to finding a wheelchair, there's plenty of choice on the market today. You can purchase a wheelchair through a variety of retailers, but few offer the selection, expertise, and commitment to service that Independent Living Specialists offers. In addition to our wide selection of wheelchairs, we also offer mobility scooters, lift chairs, walkers and a variety of accessories, designed to assist those with mobility issues.

A properly outfitted wheelchair can help you or your loved one to live a more independent life permitting you to work, travel, shop and socialise with friends and family. Choosing the right wheelchair requires careful consideration of several factors, including your lifestyle, medical condition, physique, and many other factors.

The staff at Independent Living Specialist are customer service oriented and specially trained to help you find the perfect chair for your needs.





Unlike many other mobility aid providers, we also staff Occupational Therapists, specifically trained to improve performance and quality of life through the proper use of assistive devices. Our Occupational Therapists can help you assess your needs and aid you in choosing the right wheelchair not only for your current requirements but for future ones as well. ILS also services the products available, including preventative maintenance. ILS employs fully qualified technicians to service and care for your wheelchair to provide repairs and to keep your wheelchair operating at its peak. ILS offers:

- Preventative Maintenance
- Repairs
- Safety Checks
- Cleaning
- Brakes
- Batteries and Spare Parts

At ILS we are a clinically driven business dedicated to providing comfort, dignity, independence and improved quality of life to those in our community who require assistance.

Whether you are purchasing just a wheelchair or need multiple products to help deal with a serious injury, chronic illness, or the effects of ageing, ILS provides personalised support and occupational therapist services to help you live independently. We are not just a place for you to purchase a wheelchair; we provide a customised service to match our products against your needs.

To learn more about Independent Living Specialist, call us at **1300 008 267** or visit our website at www.ilsau.com.au



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