

16. Notes for using wheelchairs

Some elder's may have mobility problems because of physical impairment
Suitable walking aids or wheelchairs can help them
expand their scope of daily activities

and help them take better care of themselves

If they have such needs

the elder should consult a physiotherapist as referred by the doctor
so as to assess their mobility level

"body build, living environment and the carer's capability"

in order to decide the most suitable wheelchair or walking aid

Let's see what factors should be considered

when choosing wheelchairs or walking aids

There are many types of wheelchairs in the market

The following factors should be considered:

Size of the wheelchair:

when choosing wheelchairs or walking aids

"the seat depth, width, height of the seat and length of leg rests"

are also important considerations

The cushion should be able to support the body weight stably

If the cushion or backrest is too soft or sagged

it cannot give support to ensure a correct sitting posture

This can lead to back pain

or pressure sores

The backrest should also provide adequate support

Some elders may need head support too

Some wheelchairs can be folded up at the backrest

and stowed in a horizontal boot of a car

If the backrest is not foldable

you won't be able to shut the boot lid

and a fastening belt must be used

"Alternatively, use a car with a vertical boot"

Note that certain cushion materials may make the user slide forward easily

This results in bad sitting posture or cleaning problems

So choose a wheelchair carefully

The extra cushion must be fixed and

the position of the leg rests should be adjusted accordingly

so the user can rest his feet flat

and sit with hips at 90 degrees

Armrests and leg rests :

for elders who need extra help when transferring

choose a wheelchair with detachable armrests and moveable leg rests

This type of wheelchair is more convenient

and safer when transferring the elder from chair to bed

The carer can save energy too

Length of the armrests can also affect activities

"Usually, long armrests would prevent the elder"

from reaching to the edge of a table

"Contrarily, if the armrests are short"

the elder can sit close to the table and facilitate activities at the table

Tyres :

there are two types in general

Wheelchairs with large wheels can be pushed by either the elder or the carer

Wheelchairs with small wheels can only be pushed by the carer

Pneumatic and solid tyres are the two most common types of tyres

Pneumatic tyres are more shock absorbent

but they have to be regularly pumped to maintain the correct pressure

Solid tyres do not need pumping

Tilting lever :

Step on this lever when going up a kerb

You can tilt the front wheels

at a suitable height to get on the kerb

Some wheelchairs are lighter

"For example, wheelchairs with small wheels"

are usually lighter than those with big wheels

Materials also affect its weight

Lightweight wheelchairs are easier to lift and stow away

Safety belt:

Safety belt enhances the user's safety

"In the following situations, the carer should put a safety belt on the elder"

When he cannot sit steadily on the wheelchair

using the wheelchair on transport

"ramps, kerbs"

and uneven road surface

The safety belt should go across the waist and fit suitably
It should allow one palm to slide through
between the body of the elder and the safety belt
When using a detachable safety belt
secure it under the arm rests
When using a wheelchair on public transport
such as a bus
use the safety belt provided
even if the elder is already wearing his own safety belt
The carer has to keep an eye on his sitting posture
and condition to ensure safety
"Now, let's see when going out"
what wheelchair handling techniques should we use
and what we should look out for
Remember three things when using a wheelchair
"First, before lifting the elder onto a bed"
doing other transfers or after parking the wheelchair
always lock the wheelchair brakes to ensure safety
"Second, when pushing a wheelchair"
the carer should keep his back straight and propel with the lower limbs
Make sure that the elder's arms are inside the armrests
so that they won't be hit by objects when turning or crossing doorways
The carer should constantly communicate with the elder
and keep an eye on his condition
If you want to push the wheelchair in a straight line
push it forward with both hands with even force
If one hand is pushing more forcefully than the other
the wheelchair will turn towards the weak side
and lead to swaying or turning
"When going up a kerb, the wheelchair should face the front"
The carer should put one foot on the tilting lever of the wheelchair
Lift up the front wheels through coordination of the upper and lower limbs
Do it gently
"Just straighten the back, tighten up the abdomen and stand with wide base"
Then you only need to bend the knees slightly and keep weight down
Pull backwards and downward at the same time to lift up the front wheels
first
"Next, //push the whole wheelchair up the kerb"

"At this point, remember to use the lower limbs for strength"
When going down a kerb
turn the wheelchair around so that the back faces the kerb
"Keep your back straight, tighten up the abdomen and stand with wide base"
to prevent the sudden sliding down or jerky movements of the wheelchair
which may cause discomfort or injury to the elder
Control the rear wheels to go down the kerb first
followed by the front wheels
There are also power-aided wheelchairs in the market
which are easier to push
or can be controlled by the elderly
So if suitable
you can consider an electric wheelchair
Always remember to strike a balance between helping
the elder to look after themselves
and encouraging him to use his existing ability
On questions about mobility assessment
"and other related issues, consult a physiotherapist"
The technique of going up and down ramps is much similar to going up
and down kerbs
Whether going up or down a ramp
the wheelchair should face the upward sloping direction
This can prevent the elder from falling off the wheelchair
When travelling on a steep and wide ramp
go forward in a zig-zag pattern
When going down a ramp
turn the wheelchair around
and go slowly to avoid accident
If there is a hand brake
use it to reduce speed when necessary
"Remember, even if the elder is wearing a safety belt"
he must always face the up side of a slope
with his back facing the down side
to prevent accidents
Communicate with the elder and check his condition from time to time
If a wheelchair user wants to go to a different floor
The first choice is to use an elevator
If there is no elevator

use a wheelchair stair lift or stair climber

The stair lift platform

usually accommodates one wheelchair only

Pay attention to the maximum load and height limit

When operating the stair lift

make sure it has reached a safe position and the ramp is properly open before pushing the wheelchair onto or from the platform

"If there is a safety belt, it should be put on"

when the stair lift is in operation

the elder should keep both arms inside the armrests to avoid injury

"Many places in Hong Kong, such as MTR stations and shopping centres" are installed with wheelchair stair lift

Check with the staff for use

The wheelchair stair lifts in some public places

can be activated with public keys so the elder can help themselves

"For details, see Part VII ""Community Resources"""

A stair climber can also help the elder to go up and down stairs

"When choosing one, check that it does not exceed the maximum load"

Consider the type of wheelchair you are using and the environment of the stairs

such as the gradient and load capacity of the surface material

"When using a stair climber, make sure it has sufficient reserve power"

The wheelchair must be securely fastened on the unit

and the wheelchair user must wear a safety belt

Remember to keep his arms inside the armrests

"The carer should observe the ""Eight Principles of Lifting and Transfer"""

when operating a stair climber

That means plan the route

and remove all obstacles

"When using a stair climber, keep your back straight"

tighten up the abdomen and stand with wide base

Always use the lower limbs for strength

and keep the distance between the carer and the stair climber to the minimum

Before using any of the above assistive devices

in addition to understanding the operation

the carer should also have appropriate training beforehand so as to use

them properly
and skilfully to ensure safety