

HOW TO CHOOSE AND MAINTAIN THE PARTS OF YOUR WHEELCHAIR: TOP ARTICLES



Yes, you can.®

Introduction

Is a part of your wheelchair broken or malfunctioning? Are you planning to upgrade an element of your chair?

As you would expect, **the different parts of a wheelchair are critical to its performance** but it can be difficult to decide what options are best for you and your wheelchair.

Fortunately, we have joined together the best articles from Passionate People's blog to help you **understand, choose and maintain the different parts of your wheelchair.**

In this collection of articles, you will find information about:

Wheelchair tyres: options and maintenance	3
Camber?: why it matters for your wheelchair	5
Wheelchair leg rest selection depends on your individual needs	7
3 Tips for choosing better wheelchair wheels	9
Wheelchair brakes: how to maintain and take care of them	11
Why is the design and selection of my wheelchair cushion so important?	13
Wheelchair accessories: bags and extras	15
Wheelchair rain covers: options, design and examples	18
Resources: all our free ebooks	20



Wheelchair tyres, options and maintenance



As you would expect a wheelchair tyre is critical to the performance of the device but it can sometimes be difficult to know which one will suit you and your wheelchair best.

There are 5 areas to consider when reviewing **wheelchair tyre** options:

1. Measurements
2. Type
3. Maintenance
4. Task
5. Environment

Measurements

Wheelchair tyre size is relatively self-explanatory, if it's the wrong size it won't fit. The size is normally printed somewhere on the wheel itself so if looking for a replacement this should be simple enough to find. Remember that the wheel is measured in inches and includes the diameter of the whole unit (wheel and tyre) not just the wheel.

Depth of tread is added on the measurement as the second figure, for example 25 mm x 1.5 mm means tread of 1.5 mm depth.

Wheelchair Tyre Types

► Pneumatic

Pneumatic or air-filled tyres are usually found on larger wheels on self-propelled or electric wheelchairs. They are very light which helps when being lifted into a car and helps the wheelchair user to maximize efficiency of movement. As they are air filled they provided a dampening effect compared with solid tyres over outdoor terrain.

This type of **wheelchair tyre** tends to have a deeper tread providing increased grip which is good for stability and makes the journey more comfortable.

The down side of a pneumatic **wheelchair tyre** is that it requires regular maintenance. As it is air filled it is more susceptible to puncture and/or general loss of pressure. This means that tyre pressure should be checked regularly and equal pressure maintained in all tyres to ensure a safe and smooth experience.

► **Solid**

Solid **wheelchair tyres** are usually made from rubber but can also be different forms of plastic. As they lack air on a form of inner tube it makes them less flexible or able to adapt to altering terrain. This in turn makes the ride less smooth or comfortable.

However, the positive to a solid **wheelchair tyre** is that it cannot be punctured or deflate therefore requires significantly less maintenance and lasts a lot longer making the solid tyre more cost effective.

► **Pneumatic puncture proof**

Made for exactly the same purpose as the standard pneumatic **wheelchair tyre** but with an inner tube manufactured from material such as Kevlar that is puncture resistant.

It can be slightly heavier than the standard pneumatic tyre but has less maintenance requirements.

The main difference is the cost. Due to its complex design and manufacture the puncture proof tyre is significantly more expensive than the alternatives.

Maintenance

Consider the main points:

Air filled **wheelchair tyres** need to be checked weekly.

How the tyre pressure affects the driving performance of your wheelchair:

The correct air pressure air pressure in a tyre helps to distribute the weight of wheelchair and user evenly across the tyres tread pattern, so the tyre (and the wheelchair) is at its most stable and agile. When a tyre is under-inflated or over-inflated, it loses rigidity, negatively affecting handling, cornering, and stopping. Eventually the tyre will also start to wear unevenly. Under-inflated tyres tend to show wear on the outside edges of the tread, while over-inflated tyres show wear down the middle of the tread. To know how much pressure you'll have to give to your tyres, the pressure is normally printed somewhere on the tyre itself. With a manometer you can ensure that you have the exact same pressure in both of the tyres. With a manometer you can ensure that you have the exact same pressure in both tyres. Having uneven pressure can impact the driving performance, smoothness, maneuverability, speed and control of your wheelchair.

Although tyre pressure depends on type and configuration the chart below gives an indication of requirements:

	Maximum pressure
Light wheel	10 bar
Maximum pressure	1000 kPa
7 bar	145 psi
700 kPa	
101 psi	Schwalbe® One
	Maximum pressure
Profile tyre	10 bar
Maximum pressure	1000 kPa
7 bar	145 psi
700 kPa	
101 psi	Schwalbe® Right turn, blue
	Maximum pressure
Schwalbe® Marathon plus tyre	10 bar
	1000 kPa
	145 psi

It is crucial that the tyre is attached to the wheel correctly the rim be damaged and debris can protrude any gaps and cause critical damage to the unit otherwise the rim of the wheel can get damaged. This is especially true when using your wheelchair in areas of rough terrain or where there may be debris that could get stuck in the gap between the rim and the ill fitted tyre.

Task

Always consider what tasks the wheelchair user is completing and how the tyre, type or size, supports active and independent engagement. Will reducing weight mean that the user expends less energy and is then able to see the task through to its conclusion? Will deep tread with increased friction create too much resistance to support independent movement in the context of a task that requires regular adjustment of position?

Environment

The surroundings and in particular the ground surface where a wheelchair user spends their time or travels should be a determining factor in wheel and tyre selection. Is the surface, smooth, rough, bumpy or slippery? How will the choice of tyre impact the user's comfort and ease of use? Is space an issue and therefore will width and depth of tyre be a vital consideration?

What Is Camber? Why It Matters For Your Wheelchair



If you are a new wheelchair user, you may not have heard the word “**camber**” before. Or maybe you’ve heard it, but you still don’t know what it means.

Is camber important? Is it something that should matter to you?

Camber is the measurement of the angle of a set of wheels in relation to the surface of the ground. If a wheel is completely straight up and down, and it is completely perpendicular to the ground, then the camber angle measurement is zero. If the wheel angle is toward the vehicle (or wheelchair) at the top, it creates what is considered a negative measurement of camber. If the wheels were to angle away from the vehicle (or wheelchair), then that would create a positive camber measurement.

Wheelchair Camber

When talking about wheelchair camber, the term only applies to the rear wheels. Camber can improve lateral stability, which is why it is often seen in sports chairs. It can also improve other handling aspects of the chair.

Most wheelchairs do not come with the option to adjust the camber once it is made. You usually have to order the chair with the degree of camber that you want. During construction, camber is adjusted by inserting a bar that changes the angle of the wheels or adjusts the axle plate.

Benefits Of Adding Camber

The more camber a wheelchair is given, the wider it becomes across the bottom. This added width provides more lateral stability. It also redirects force, which makes a softer, less bumpy ride. Greater camber also allows the wheelchair to make quicker turns.

There are also benefits for your body, too. Angling the wheels put the push rims in a better position for grasping and pushing. You also use a more natural body motion when pushing cambered wheels. The angle allows you to push down and out.

The plane of the wheelchair in a cambered chair is closer to your shoulders. This puts less strain on the shoulders when propelling the chair. And your fingers and hands are protected from bumps and scrapes when you maneuver through tight spaces with cambered wheels. Because they are wider, the bottoms of your wheels will always hit an obstacle first.

Another thing that some people may see as a benefit is that cambered wheels make a chair look sportier. If you are an athletic individual, that may be a look that you like.

Disadvantages Of Adding Camber

Cambered wheels do have some disadvantages. Cambered wheels are wider. This may make it more difficult to fit through doorways, down aisles, or to maneuver around furniture. When you are in a restaurant, especially, it can be difficult for chairs with cambered wheels to get around without bumping into other tables and guests.

Cambered chairs often cost more. Due to their sporty nature, a cambered chair may also have had other things done to it to improve durability or to make it lightweight. These improvements are positive, but they can incur extra expenses.

If the camber of the chair is excessive, then the top of the wheels may rub against the wheelchair side panels, or against the wheelchair user. That can cause anything from minor dirt stains on clothing to skin irritation.

Cambered tyres need special treads to avoid wearing down unevenly. Traditional tyre treads are centered in the middle of the tyre. When they are cambered, they wear down too quickly on the sides. To solve this problem, you will have to buy tyres that have had the tread placed on the inside edge. These tyres are specially made for cambered wheels.

Now you know what camber is, you can decide if a cambered wheelchair fits your lifestyle!

Wheelchair leg rest selection depends on your individual needs



You've found the perfect wheelchair for your needs, but is there something else you need to bear in mind? Yes, there is! Selecting an appropriate leg rest.

Choosing the right kind of **wheelchair leg rest, also known as wheelchair leg support**, is a very important decision. In fact, if you don't have the right kind of leg rest then you could easily face discomfort, increased spasticity and even a worsening of your condition. So getting it right is important. A number of considerations come into play here, and it is vital that you are fully informed when it comes to the types available and the benefits they offer. You need appropriate support for the foot and leg when using a wheelchair. If you do not have this level of support, you could face problems such as back pain and pressure in the buttocks, which can mean considerable discomfort.

Wheelchair leg rest types

There are **two types of leg rests for wheelchairs**: articulated and elevated leg rests.

The main function of either type of leg support is either elevating or articulating, is **repositioning of the user to spread out the pressure load and help increase circulation to prevent swelling**. Both types are available on a wide range of wheelchairs (standard equipment on reclining and tilting wheelchairs), but they offer a different experience.

In any case, keep in mind that the angle at which a leg rest is attached to the wheelchair (normally 70, 80 or 90 degrees), can affect pelvic position and can impact your sitting position in the wheelchair. Also, the angle will affect your movements in closed spaces, i.e. turning

circles of the wheelchair and access around the house. You can also have powered leg rests and manual use leg rests. While the choice can seem a little overwhelming, your medical condition may well determine which leg rest option you take.

Elevating leg rests are designed for comfort

Leg rests should be designed to bring comfort and support to the user. The elevated leg rest can be set at any angle and are usually able to be set between 70 degrees and 180 degrees. When set at 180 degrees, this means that the leg rest is level with the seat of the wheelchair.

These types of leg rests have special calf pads that help support this part of the leg when it is elevated. One great aspect of an elevated wheelchair leg rest is the **ability to properly position the leg if the knee has restrictive movement bent**. If your medical condition is such that you cannot bend your leg at all, the elevated wheelchair leg rest allows you to firmly set the leg rest at the fully elevated position. This allows the leg to be kept straight with no effort required by the wheelchair user.

The elevated leg rests always remain at the same elevation, so they really suit those wheelchair users who have to keep their leg suspended in the same position at all times. In certain manufacturers designs, if the elevation needs to be changed at any point, then the length of the wheelchair leg rest will have to be adjusted, so that the feet rest in a natural position on the footrest. Other manufacturer elevating legrests have been designed so that the pivot point sits next to the knee eliminating the above issue.

Articulated leg rests offer a different kind of experience

Articulated leg rests extend in length as they are elevated. This means they make perfect sense for a wheelchair user who needs, for comfort's sake, to bend the leg occasionally. Sometimes these rests are motorized too, so the whole process can be very easy to manage. What's important to remember here is that **these leg rests are designed to allow freedom of movement**. This could be particularly important for someone who has a blood pressure problem, or just needs, as part of their therapy, to keep the leg moving. A key aspect here is the adjustment in length that the articulated wheelchair leg rest provides automatically. This allows for freedom of movement without the need to keep adjusting the length manually.

So, which type of wheelchair leg support should I choose?

The choice revolves around the movement required for your leg. If you are not allowed to move your leg, then an elevated wheelchair leg rest makes sense. If you can have movement (or if it is recommended that you have movement) then an articulated wheelchair leg rest will be a more suitable solution.

If you need to select one for your wheelchair, make sure you try them out first. Selection should always be done with the consultation of a qualified therapist. Some leg rests have pads that are comfortable, and enhance the experience, while some don't. Also, it may be worth looking at leg rests that are powered, just to make their use that bit easier.

3 Tips for Choosing Better Wheelchair Wheels



When configuring your wheelchair, it's important to consider, what wheels you need.

The choice you make will depend on your primary use, be it indoor or outdoor, plus the terrain and the activity involved. Making the right choice can be crucial. Someone with a pain condition really doesn't need a lot of vibration, and other users may value speed as part of their sense of independence. Here's the information you need to choose wisely:

The smoothness of the ride, speed, maneuverability, and control are all related to the **wheelchair wheels, tyres and castors**. Choosing these components is not a straightforward task. So it's wise to get an expert, such a therapist or healthcare professional to help you select the combination that meets your lifestyle, performance, maintenance and affordability needs.

Wheelchair wheels components and considerations

Manual wheelchairs usually have two sets of wheels:

- ▶ A pair in front (**called castor or steering wheels**);
- ▶ And a pair in the back (**called drive wheels or real wheels**).

Power wheelchairs may have up to three pairs:

- ▶ **One drive;**
- ▶ **Two caster.**

Wheelchair wheels are made up of a **rim** (and **hand rim** on manual chairs), **spokes** (or mags), and a hub. The hub is the centre of the wheel, the spokes (or mags) connect the rim to the hub and the rim is where the **tire** is mounted. Hand rims are used for pushing the wheelchair.

Spoke wheels look like bicycle wheels and are made of metal. They usually have more than thirty spokes.

Mag wheels are made of synthetic materials and usually have less than ten spokes.

Important factors to consider when selecting the appropriate type of wheels for you **is their weight**, and **the environment you will be using them in**. Spoke wheels are usually lighter than mag wheels but they require more maintenance. Mag wheels are almost maintenance free but they may be affected by extreme temperatures.

Wheel sizes in regard to wheelchair sizes

Wheelchair wheels come in various to fit the array of standard wheelchairs:

▶ **A standard manual adult wheelchair drive wheel** size is 24" (~61cm);

▶ **A standard power wheelchair drive wheel** size is 18" (~45,7cm).

▶ **Caster wheels** start from 3" (~7,6cm).

The wheel size affects comfort and required effort to move the wheelchair. Therefore you should select a drive wheel that will allow you to sit comfortably in the chair and at the same time requires a minimum amount of effort to propel it.

Electric wheelchair wheels are smaller and made of a harder material.

Alignment and truing

The alignment of the wheels is very important. It affects how the wheelchair rides, its stability, the wear on the tires and the effort required to propel it. You need to consider the following three aspects:

▶ **Camber** is the inward or outward tilting of a wheel in its vertical plane. It is used to make propelling the wheelchair easier. It mostly applies to people who are self-propelling, and **provides better lateral stability**;

▶ **A critical alignment issue is toe-in and toe-out** (the off-parallel relationship between the two rear wheels). You should avoid these misalignments, as they will **dramatically**

increase rolling resistance and the wear on the tyres;

▶ **Truing (aligning) a wheel** is required when a wheel wobbles when spinning on its axis. Mag wheels are trued upon fabrication and remain true unless they are exposed to extreme conditions. Spoke wheels are more vulnerable because various conditions get the spokes distorted. Such problems have to be repaired by a qualified wheel-repair technician.

What about?

Wheelchair can be **pneumatic (air filled)**, **solid and flat free (foam, urethane or rubber filled)**. Depending on the desired terrain use, they may be **knobbly** or **smooth**. As a rule of thumb, you need to know that tires affect how easily the wheelchair will roll over specific surfaces. **The harder the tire, the easier it will be to propel the wheelchair. The softer, the harder it will be to propel it.** Here are your choices:

▶ **Pneumatic** will go flat if punctured and will go soft even without any damage but provide soft rides;

▶ **Solid** are almost maintenance free and they are unlikely to wear out in the life of the wheelchair, but you'll be in for bumpier rides.

▶ **Flat free** are pneumatic that are filled with a semi-solid material. They are not subject to flat and give a softer ride than a solid.

How to Fit a Wheelchair Tyres:

Once you've bought some new tyres, you'll need to get them fitted. If you can do it yourself, you'll save yourself a bit of time, and gain the satisfaction of being able to maintain your wheelchair yourself. Otherwise go back to your local service centre or retailer and they will be happy to fit them for you..

Conclusion

There are pros and cons to each type of wheelchair wheel. An average user will probably not notice these differences, but a very active user will. You may need to consider having more than one type depending on the use and so have not been covered in this article. You may find that you need high performance wheels which are not meant for the average wheelchair user. The sky's your limit, and the cost of course!

Wheelchair brakes: how to maintain and take care of them



Wheelchair brakes hold a wheelchair stationary and keep the user safe. Do you know how to maintain and take care of your wheelchair brakes? Do you know when to replace them? This article will tell you everything you need to know about this vital equipment.

Types of wheelchair brakes

There are a number of types of brakes that wheelchair users can install on their chair's wheels. They are designed to hold a wheelchair in a safe stop. The brakes are usually called wheelchair wheel locks or wheelchair brakes. They can keep a wheelchair stationary when the user is engaged in a task or transferring to another piece of equipment.

Types of wheelchair wheel locks

The most commonly used wheel lock on a manual wheelchair is the push / pull lock. A lever is pulled or pushed (hence the name) to make a bar press into the tyre of the chair, keeping it steady and stable. Different locks are available to suit people with different degrees of strength and co-ordination, so test out a few before making your purchase, to ensure you get one you can easily manage.

Scissor locks are designed for more active wheelchair users, but could prove difficult for people with limited fine motor skills. While wheel hub locks have a concealed lever that locks the wheel via the wheel hub instead of the tyre.

Extensions are also available for people who have less strength or limited reach, which can help a wheelchair user to operate their chair independently.

How to slow a wheelchair down when it is in motion

Wheel locks are not designed to slow a wheelchair down when it is moving, and using them for this purpose can cause a the user to fall from the chair and suffer serious injury.

A power assist wheelchair fills the gap between a manual chair with no brake assistance, and a powerchair with brakes. A power assist wheelchair looks similar to a manual one, but comes with clever technology installed, which automatically applies the brakes when the wheelchair user is going downhill. The light electronics detect the hand movement on the rims of a chair's wheels, and slows or stops a chair according to what they sense.

Electric wheelchairs also have braking systems that allow the user to slow down and stop without requiring physical effort or careful manual dexterity. Usually operated by the user's hand or head movements, brakes keep the user safe in a busy world and are a vital aspect of a modern wheelchair.

How to maintain and care for your wheelchair brakes

Carrying out ongoing care and maintenance of the brakes

on your wheelchair is incredibly important, so that they last a long time and do not cause any safety or usability issues.

Your wheelchair's brakes should really be checked once per week. Make sure you look at:

- ▶ whether the brakes are looser or tighter against the tyre than usual. whether the brakes are looser or tighter against the tyre than normal. Any variation is likely down to a change in the air pressure of the tyre, ensuring that the correct air pressure is maintained will positively impact the effectiveness of your brakes.
- ▶ whether the brakes are effectively stopping the chair from moving.
- ▶ whether the brakes are easy to lock and unlock.

Always double check your chair's manual when you want to check how effectively your brakes and wheel locks are working. If they then need to be tightened or loosened, especially when you first get the wheelchair, the instructions are likely to be within the manual. Often, it is possible for the user of the chair or their assistant to do this themselves.

If you need adjustments that you are unable to carry out yourself, take your wheelchair to a repair shop, or even to a bicycle repair store, to get the brakes adjusted professionally.

Pressure Care: Why is the Design and Selection of my Wheelchair Cushion So Important?



One size, one shape does not fit all!

The goal in the selection of a **wheelchair cushion** is to provide for an individual's positioning needs and provide **pressure care** while promoting functional mobility and activities from the wheelchair.

A wheelchair and seating assessment with a healthcare specialist is recommended to help determine the product features and benefits that best match your needs.

Throughout the day, we transition from a **"resting posture"** where we can allow our muscles and body to relax, to a **"ready posture"** where we can engage in an activity.

Pressure Care Principles

Whether you use a power wheelchair or manual wheelchair as your primary means of mobility, immobility alone is a high-risk factor for pressure injury. Direct pressure is a vertical force on the body. **Pressure**= Force divided by

Area. The larger the area to disperse pressure on your buttocks and thighs, the less overall pressure on the bones and tissues. This is a primary means to decrease overall sitting pressure. Based on your body measurements, the size of the wheelchair seat and the size of the seat cushion is determined. If it is sized correctly, you will decrease the overall sitting pressure. If it is too small, it can increase pressures under the buttocks and cause an increase in a pressure injury.

Manual pressure relief refers to the ability to independently adjust your own position in the wheelchair. This helps reduce the risk of pressure build up under the IT's (seat bones).. If you are unable to shift your own weight to protect your skin, your therapist may recommend other means to effectively shift your weight, or discuss the need for a power wheelchair with **"power seat actuators"**. Specifically power tilt and power recline can help you shift your own weight for pressure relief. In addition to reduced sitting pressures, changing positions can provide postural support, improve sitting balance and comfort.

Here are some additional terms that your therapist or health professional may use when showing you and trialing wheelchair cushions.

1- Pelvic Stability

Pelvic stability is a term which describes when the pelvis is positioned in a “neutral position” i.e. not rotating backwards or forwards. Pelvic stability is achieved through matching the contours of the cushion surface to the contours of the buttocks. When the pelvis is stable this in turn creates stability in the spine, as the two are connected. When the spine is stable the trunk can extend helping open up the chest, aiding breathing and digestion as well as other physiological functions of the body. Stabilising the pelvis and the spine is essential for the individual to be able to use their arms without losing their balance. This is critical for lots of activities including propelling and reaching.

2- Immersion

The term **Immersion** (the ability to sink into the cushion without bottoming out) maximises surface contact area between the user and the cushion. Most commonly you will hear this term used in connection with the Ischial tuberosities (IT's). In order to reduce the build up of peak pressure under the IT's the IT's need to be able to immerse into the cushion which in turn helps create more contact between the cushion and the user.

3- Off-loading

The principle of “**Off-loading**” transfers weight bearing forces away from the IT's to the femur and thigh tissues. With less direct pressure to under these bony prominences we reduce the incidence of pressure injuries.

4- Envelopment

The next design principle is called “**envelopment**”- the material in the cushion surrounds or engulf the bony prominences and aids in “dispersing pressure” across the entire surface area of the cushion thus reducing it under the bony prominences.

5- Shear management

Shear management is accomplished when the cushion is designed so that when the body or pelvis is shifting on the cushion, the material moves with it and decreases the shear of the body tissue and bony structures to minimize pressure injury. Shear forces are “parallel forces” that cause tissues to “deform” in shape under the skin.

6- Friction

Friction is a “resistance” that arises when one surface rubs against another. This relates to the cushion cover and clothing on the individual which can cause friction and therefore damage to the skin and subsequently the tissues of the buttocks.

7- Temperature and moisture

Temperature and moisture can have a direct impact on pressure because as the body temperature is raised the skin and tissues are more susceptible to pressure injury.

Important features of the products to consider when selecting a wheelchair cushion are:

- ▶ The shape and materials used to create the cushion.
- ▶ The overall weight of the cushion, especially if it is being matched with an lightweight wheelchair.
- ▶ Care and maintenance of the cushion. Does it need to be inflated or kneaded to maintain its effectiveness?
- ▶ The Temperature and climate where it will be used, as this can change the effectiveness of the material for posture and pressure management.
- ▶ How will the shape and dimensions affect functional transfers and propulsion, meaning how easy is it to move forward on the cushion to transfer in/out of the wheelchair.

Remember, **an assessment with a wheelchair specialist** will help you identify your seating goals and minimize pressure injuries. They will assess your skin integrity, sitting balance, spinal asymmetries, range of motion, flexibility, tone, and reflexes. These factors among others will help in the selection of the wheelchair cushion.

Wheelchair accessories: bags and extras for practicality and fashion



Praise be for wheelchair accessories! They're absolute lifesavers when your hands are full but you need a crafty cup holder for a pint, or you're out and about doing the shopping and you need somewhere to put all those purchases.

In fact, of all the wheelchair accessories, bags are the best. If you're yet to open up that world of practicality, here's an overview:

Life Without Wheelchair Accessories: Bags

A short while ago, a news story of a wheelchair user seen with bags piled on top of them went viral. Clearly, it was not a good way to carry shopping. **Hanging shopping bags off the wheelchair's handles** happens often but **can also cause problems with stability**. Alternatively, dumping everything on your knees is **uncomfortable**. It also makes it **hard to push yourself along**, and you won't be able to carry much that way.

What's more, when wheelchair users **hang bags over their push handles, this can cause problems to the chair.** Over time, the weight of the bags can **cause the backrest canvas to sag** so that ultimately it needs to be replaced. **A sagging backrest is less supportive too.** Trying to get on without proper wheelchair bags clearly has major downsides.

Wheelchair bags

Yet wheelchair shopping bags are widely available – not to mention a really effective way to carry shopping. A bag purpose-made for your chair preserves the backrest's integrity, and allows you to carry your shopping comfortably.

Attractive wheelchair accessories

There is a growing trend to make disability accessories more attractive and fashionable, and this is reflected in the wheelchair shopping bags that are available. While some people prefer plain bags, for those who want something patterned or brightly coloured, there are options available.

For people with disabled parking badges, pretty cases can also be bought to store and display them when they are in use. There are many designs available, made from different fabrics to suit your style or your mood.

The world of wheelchair accessories is vast. Here are some of the items that might make your life easier or more comfortable:

▶ **Discrete urine collection bags.** Many wheelchair users have catheters, but dread going outside in case people stare at them. A little black bag is all that's needed to stow a catheter away.

▶ **Cup holders.** This is a basic bit of kit that offers convenience at a barbecue or party. There's a wide selection available. Getting a cup holder that fits tightly to your chair will hold it safely out of your way and avoid spillages.

▶ **Wheelchair trays.** These are great to balance your shopping basket on at the supermarket, or for putting your plate on during mealtimes. Some even have an in-built cup holder.

▶ **Wheelchair gloves.** These are specially designed to be sturdier and longer lasting than normal gloves, and some help to stop repetitive strain injury too. They keep your hands dry, clean and safe when you self-propel your manual wheelchair. As your hands will go through a lot of pushing your wheelchair along, a good pair of gloves for wheelchair users is a wise investment.

Two Top Wheelchair Accessories Tips

▶ Check that any accessories you buy are suitable for your particular wheelchair. Match accessories to the measurements and sizes the manufacturer provided when you bought the chair;

▶ Alternatively go into a mobility store to try before you buy.

The right accessories can make a real difference to your day-to-day life. So choose wisely before you splash out to be sure of getting items you'll swear by for years.

How to choose the most suitable wheelchair shopping bag

Just as when you purchase any bag, your main consideration will be what you plan to use it for. In particular, what are the items you will want to carry in the bag? And how much access to the bag will you need when it's on your wheelchair?

The answers to these two questions will help you to identify the best bag for your needs.

1) What will you carry in your wheelchair bag?

The **size, shape and weight** of the items you are likely to be carrying will inevitably have an impact on the best choice of bag for your wheelchair.

If you simply need a small space for your purse and keys while visiting your family nearby, the bag you might choose will be very different to that of a college student who needs to carry multiple textbooks and a laptop, for instance.

2) How much access will you need to the bag?

If you want to carry a bottle of water to drink throughout the day, you will need a bag that you can access easily and without straining. On the other hand, if you need to carry a spare battery pack for your electric wheelchair and a spare raincoat, in case of a downpour, you most likely don't need a bag you can access instantly.

So, let's look at some **examples**:

1. **You need to carry heavy textbooks to college, and you won't need to access them until you get there:** a wheelchair backpack could be the perfect solution. You can carry the bulky books and just get them out and put them back in as and when you need them
2. **You want to carry your purse, keys and phone and access them numerous times throughout the day** (after all, Facebook won't check itself!): a small bag that attaches onto the armrest of your wheelchair could be the perfect solution in this scenario. You can feel safe that your money and phone are within reach, and you can access your possessions quickly and easily.
3. **You do your weekly shop and need to carry bulky and heavy goods without impeding the way your wheelchair moves.** An underseat shopping bag could be a great way to get your shopping out of the way and get it home safely
4. **You have a range of goods to carry, of differing sizes and weights.** Consider a saddle bag, which is constructed to offer small bags at either side of the wheelchair or scooter's seat, and one behind the seat. These types of bags are designed to let the equipment carry the weight of any belongings you carry, so can be great for shopping trips or holidays.

5. **Do you have heavy shopping or goods to transport?** Selecting a shopping bag that is supported behind or underneath the wheelchair's seat is probably a better option than one that attaches to the arm rests. You don't want to destabilise your chair and cause problems with balance.
6. **How much flexibility and dexterity do you have?** Do you have support to access a bag you cannot reach? Always choose a bag that fits within your physical capabilities, or that your carer or assistant can help you to access.

A final thing to consider, **when choosing a wheelchair shopping bag**, is how sturdy is the **construction**. The last thing you want to do is invest in an item that is poorly constructed and will fray, tear or come apart at the seams within weeks or months of use. When a bag is attached to a wheelchair, a bag can be subject to more wear and tear than a more standard bag, so examine the quality of the bag before you make your final decision.

Wheelchair Rain Covers as Cool as They are Dry



Sitting in wet clothes is no fun at all. Wearing **wheelchair rain covers** that don't suit you is only marginally better, but thankfully, fashion designers have created some wheelchair covers that actually look good on people. Now you can stay dry and feel good too!

So before the next downpour strikes, let's review the choices available whether you opt for a colourful poncho style, a cape or apron style or a wheelchair cosy. There's something for every wheelchair or scooter too!

Choosing the right wheelchair rain covers?

► **First, think of what you'll use it for.** A keen angler might need something heavier duty than someone just moving between a car and the office. Also, is it a breezy cover for warm summer storms, or something insulated for freezing winter gales?

► You should also consider which **design is easiest for you to put on independently** and move around in.

► The **level of waterproofing** you need is important. As we'll see, there's a big difference between 'showerproof' and 'waterproof'.

► The **size of your medical or mobility equipment** and the area you need to cover is something to factor in too.

► Last but definitely not least, you should consider your personal style.

Wheelchair covers can be lined for warmth

In winter months, a layer of lining can help to keep you warm as well as dry. But don't forget about Spring and Summer showers where it might be hot and wet. Ultimately, having a cover for every eventuality is probably the best solution.

To start off with, why not get one for your immediate needs? **If it's warm now, try a lighter, unlined wheelchair cover.** You can always buy extra items later on. And when it's time to get a winter cover, you might want to use it in combination with wheelchair gloves for warmth and to protect your hands.

What wheelchair rain cover design are you looking for?

There are cape-style wheelchair covers called **ponchos**. These protect a large area. Alternatively, you can get **waterproof covers for particular areas of your body**, such as your legs. You can also choose aspects of the design such as whether or not there is a **zip** and, if so, where it is positioned.

These design factors will determine how easy it is for you to put on your cover, and how freely you are able to move about in it. Try to choose one that allows you **as much ease of movement as possible**.

How waterproof is the wheelchair cover, really?

There is a big, wet difference between clothes that are waterproof and those that are showerproof.

Both showerproof and waterproof wheelchair covers will be made out of waterproof material. Yet the assembly of the seams will dictate whether they are completely waterproof or just suitable for use in light showers. You wouldn't want to face a serious downpour in something just showerproof. For a fully waterproof wheelchair cover, make sure any seams are sealed with special tape that seals the stitched holes. That should keep you cosy and dry inside. **This is especially important for people who have to travel long distances outside, or who have electronic equipment that must avoid getting wet.**

Which wheelchair rain cover fits your mobility equipment?

Think about the mobility aids that you use. **Do you push them yourself, as with a self-propelled manual wheelchair?** If so, you need to consider how to keep your arms dry. A wheelchair cover or personal garment that has sleeves is ideal.

Yet, maybe someone else pushes your manual wheelchair. Or perhaps you use an electric wheelchair or mobility scooter. For both situations, a cape or poncho style waterproof cover might be better. It can keep your entire body – or just your upper body, depending on the style – covered and safe from the rain. It is also possible for power chair users to get covers that keep their hand as well as the hand controls dry.

Wheelchair covers to suit all kinds of styles

Increasingly, disability related products are becoming available in trendy styles that shake off the grey. If you like bright colours or bold designs, have a look around at the fashions available so that you buy an item that you feel proud to wear. In fact, design students at Brunel University in London created some incredibly stylish waterproof wheelchair accessories that can be used for very practical purposes.

For more **fashion pointers**, check out our article 'How Adaptive Clothing Changed Everything For Me'.

Resources



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