

YOUR WHEELCHAIR, YOUR INDEPENDENCE

Smart Skills for Teens Who Use Wheelchairs

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SCOTTISH RITE



Why Does This Matter?

- Your wheelchair isn't just equipment – it's part of your body!
- Knowing how it works gives you:
 - ✓ More **independence**
 - ✓ Less stress when something breaks
 - ✓ Better health and comfort
 - ✓ Confidence at school, sports, camp, travel and social life



60-Second Daily Safety Check

- Before leaving home:
 - ✓ Are the wheels tight?
 - ✓ Do the brakes hold firmly?
 - ✓ Is your cushion in the right position?
 - ✓ Are footrests secure?
 - ✓ Any strange noises?

If something feels different, it probably is.



Common Loose Parts (and What To Do)

- Wheels/quick-release axles - push axle button and re-insert wheel fully
- Brakes
- Footrests & Armrests
- Backrest hardware
 - make sure parts click into place
 - tighten hand knobs or visible screws
- Tell an adult or therapist if:
 - Wheel wobbles
 - Brake doesn't stop chair
 - Parts keep loosening
 - Something is bent or cracked



Wheelchair Survival Kit

- Keep in a backpack or chair bag:
 - Allen wrench set (most chairs use these – metric AND standard)
 - Small multitool
 - Phone with repair contacts
 - Spare tube (if air tires)
 - Gloves
 - Small flashlight
- Independence = being prepared



SPOT THE PROBLEM



SPOT THE PROBLEM



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IMPORTANCE OF SKIN CHECKS

- Sitting all day creates pressure on skin, especially with reduced sensation.
- Pressure combined with moisture speeds up the process of skin breakdown.
- Skin problems can start SMALL and become serious fast.
- **Check at least TWICE a day:**
 - Morning
 - After school/evening
 - Anytime you feel pain or warmth



High Risk Areas

- Bottom/sit bones
- Tailbone
- Hips
- Back of thighs
- Heels/feet
- Ankles
- Anywhere touching braces or straps



- Use a mirror, phone camera, caregiver assistance, or Pressure Ulcer Prevention App.
- Our bodies CHANGE as we GROW, which could lead to different pressure points.



Warning Signs of Skin Trouble

- Report **immediately**:
 - Redness that doesn't fade after 20 minutes
 - Dark/purple areas
 - Blisters/open skin
 - Pain, warmth, swelling
 - Wet spots on clothing
- **Early action** prevents pressure injuries



Pressure Relief = Your Superpower

- If able:
 - Push up on armrests
 - Lean side to side
 - Tilt/recline chair (if power chair)
- **Goal:** Every 15-30 minutes if possible.
- Even small shifts help!



Safe Transfers

- Lateral scoots
 - Don't shear bottom on wheel or hard object
- Floor>chair
 - Don't sit on hard surface or sharp object.
 - Use footplate padding to protect skin.



Proper Fit = Comfort + Safety

- Your chair should:
 - Keep hips centered
 - Support feet
 - Prevent sliding
 - Feel stable
 - Allow easy reaching
 - Be comfortable for long periods of time



Signs of Poor Fit

- Tell someone if:
 - You feel squeezed or too loose
 - Knees higher than hips
 - Feet slipping off footrests
 - New pain or fatigue
 - You slide forward
 - You've grown taller or gained weight (1-2 clothing sizes)
 - Red marks after sitting
- Growth spurts matter!



Your Chair Is Part of Your Body

- A well-fitted chair helps you:
 - Sit tall
 - Move efficiently
 - Reach things easily
 - Protect your joints and skin
 - Prevent pain and injury
 - Participate fully in life

- You should feel **IN CONTROL** – not trapped!



What To Do If Something Feels Wrong

Speak up early.

- Tell:
 - Parent/caregiver
 - School nurse
 - Therapist or doctor
 - Equipment provider
- Say:
 - “My chair doesn’t feel right.”
 - “Something is loose.”
 - “My skin hurts.”
 - “I think I’ve outgrown my chair.”

YOUR VOICE MATTERS.



Equipment Ownership Mindset

- Your chair is YOUR responsibility as you grow older.
- Know:
 - Your chair model
 - Vendor contact info
 - Warranty status
 - Maintenance schedule
 - Replacement timeline



Save Your Support Team

- Keep these contacts saved in your phone:
 - Parent/guardian
 - Nurse
 - Therapist
 - Wheelchair company
 - Emergency contact



You Are the Expert on Your Body

- You deserve:
 - Comfort
 - Safety
 - Independence
 - To be heard
- Problems are fixable.
- Asking for help = strength.



Power Wheelchair Skills

- Daily Power Chair Check
 - ✓ Battery charged
 - ✓ Charger working
 - ✓ Joystick responding normally
 - ✓ Lights/indicators functioning
 - ✓ No unusual sounds
 - ✓ Tires intact
 - ✓ Seat functions working (tilt/recline/elevate)



Smart Battery Habits

- ✓ Charge every night
- ✓ Don't let batteries fully die
- ✓ Bring charger on overnight trips
- ✓ Cold weather reduces battery life




Driving Safety

- Slow down in crowds
- Watch footplates around others
- Avoid steep side slopes
- Be cautious near water
- Use seatbelt if recommended



Emergency Situations

- If chair stops working:
 - Stay calm
 - Turn power off  back on
 - Check joystick cable
 - Call caregiver/support
 - Use manual mode only if trained




Travel & Air Travel

- Car Travel Tips
 - Secure chair properly
 - Remove detachable parts
 - Protect joystick and controls
 - Bring repair kit
 - Plan rest breaks



Transport Basics (Manual Chair)

Many chairs can be taken apart to fit into a car.

- Typical steps:
 - Remove side guards or armrests
 - Swing away or remove footrests
 - Press axle button  remove wheels
 - Fold frame
 - Lift into vehicle

Practice with therapist or caregiver.



Flying With A Wheelchair

Air travel is possible – many teens do it!

- Know:
 - ✓ Inform airline in advance
 - ✓ Bring written instructions for handling the chair
 - ✓ Remove loose parts before boarding
 - ✓ Rake cushion on plane if possible
- If going abroad:
 - ✓ Research accessibility ahead of time
 - ✓ Know voltage differences for chargers
 - ✓ Bring adapters



POP QUIZ

1. What rapidly speeds up the process of skin breakdown?
 - a) Moisture
 - b) Funky smells
 - c) Healthy diet
 - d) Wheelchair pushups



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- a) Screwdriver
- b) Allen wrench
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- a) 1 hour
- b) 90 minutes
- c) 20 minutes
- d) 5 minutes



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- caregiver
- therapist
- wheelchair company



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5. How often should you complete pressure relief?

- a) Every 5-10 minutes
- b) 1x/hour
- c) 5x/day
- d) Every 15-30 minutes



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- Pressure Ulcer Prevention App



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TRUE OR FALSE:

“My chair feels fine so I don’t need skin checks.”

“I should always change wet clothing when sitting in my wheelchair and before putting on any braces.”

“Keep ALL wheelchair parts intact before travelling on airplane.”

“I need to charge my power chair/power assist every other night.”



POP QUIZ

TRUE OR FALSE:

“My chair feels fine so I don’t need skin checks.” – FALSE

“I should always change wet clothing when sitting in my wheelchair and before putting on any braces.” – TRUE

“Keep ALL wheelchair parts intact before travelling on airplane.” – FALSE

“I need to charge my power chair/power assist every other night.” – FALSE



Final Message

Your wheelchair helps you go where you want to go!

Knowing how to manage it puts YOU in charge.

Knowledge = Power + Independence

