

Motorised Mobility Devices

Fact Sheet 3

Occupational therapist assessment for use of a mobility scooter or powered wheelchair

If you are having difficulty walking, you may be referred to an occupational therapist to determine whether your mobility needs may be met with a device such as a mobility scooter or powered wheelchair.

This fact sheet explains:

- the role of the occupational therapist,
- what is involved in assessing your suitability to use one of these devices,
- what else the occupational therapist does to help you use the device safely, and
- how they work with your GP and your family and/or carers.

How can an occupational therapist help you?

An occupational therapist helps people to maximise their independence so that they can participate in daily life and do the things they want and need to do. This includes managing daily activities by themselves, getting out and about in the community and participating in interests/hobbies and work. When you see an occupational therapist, they will give you strategies for managing any limitations and disabilities you might have.

If you are considering a motorised mobility device, such as a scooter or powered wheelchair, an occupational therapist can:

- provide advice about whether you are suited to using such a device,
- help you choose the best device to meet your needs,
- help you to learn to use the device safely,
- guide you about funding options,
- talk to your doctor about monitoring your health conditions,
- talk to your family and carers about how to support you in using the device.

How do you find an occupational therapist to do this assessment?

You may get help to find a local occupational therapist from: your GP or another health professional, the occupational therapy department at your local hospital or health centre, or the Disability/Aged care co-ordinator at your council. Occupational Therapy Australia, the peak professional body representing occupational therapists, may also be able to help. www.otaus.com.au

What does the assessment involve?

Just as for driving a car, a person needs to be physically and mentally capable of using a motorised mobility device. This protects their own safety as well as the safety of others.

First, the occupational therapist will discuss your requirements with you and your family/carers to find out how and where you want to use a motorised mobility device. This will help them to understand your needs. They will then look at whether you have:

- **adequate vision** to scan the environment and avoid hazards, including other pedestrians and vehicles,
- **appropriate thinking skills** including concentration, planning and problem-solving capability, the ability to learn new tasks and the ability to react in a timely way to situations, and
- **appropriate physical capacity** including arm strength, hand function to operate controls, sitting balance, neck movement and the ability to get on and off the device.

The occupational therapist will ask you about your current medical conditions, assess how these may impact your ability to use a mobility device safely, and may get advice from your doctor or other health professional. They will also need to observe you while you are using a device (an on-device assessment). The on-device assessment may be conducted over a couple of appointments so that you can learn how to use the device safely (depending on your previous experience with mobility devices).

What happens if you are not suited to using a mobility device?

If the occupational therapist finds that you are not suited to a motorised mobility device or not able to use one safely, they will help you to find other ways of maintaining your mobility. This will likely involve discussions with your family, carer, other health professionals and your doctor.

How do you choose the right device?

Once you have been assessed as suitable to use a motorised mobility device, the occupational therapist will work with you and the supplier to choose the right device for you. There are a lot of things to consider. This advice is important and will save you investing in a device that does not meet your needs. You should be able to trial the device before committing to buying it. At the same time, your occupational therapist will explore funding options for you and complete applications to the funding bodies as required.

What about learning how to use the device?

Learning how to use your device properly is essential. Your occupational therapist will provide education and training so that you understand safe operation of your device, manoeuvring safely in various environments, crossing the road at different types of intersections and using public transport. If you are new to using a mobility device, this training will be conducted over at least two sessions and will ideally take place in and around your home and community. The education will also cover things like mobility device maintenance, insurance and breakdown options.

Do you need to go back to the occupational therapist?

The occupational therapist may contact you in a few months' time to check that you are managing and whether you need to refresh your skills. They may ask you to return for a review if you have a medical condition that is likely to change and that might affect your ability to operate the device safely. They will advise you and your doctor about these requirements.

How long will the process take and how much will it cost?

Costs for occupational therapy services will depend on whether you are on a pension or have a health care card, if you have private health insurance, or if you are a TAC, WorkCover, DVA client or NDIS participant. The amount of time you will need with an occupational therapist will depend on whether you are a first-time user of a motorised mobility device or if you are presenting to have your needs reassessed. Costs will also depend on other factors, such as customising the device and training to your needs, and completion of any funding application. It is best to discuss costs with your occupational therapist prior to your first appointment.

This resource has been produced by Road Safety Victoria in collaboration with Austin Hospital Occupational Therapy Department to support road safety and enhance clinical practice (2020).

Your Occupational Therapist Appointments

You can use the space below to record your appointments, where you need to go for the appointments and what you need to bring with you.

Occupational therapist

Address & phone

Parking

Appointments:

Date & Time

Date & Time

1)

3)

2)

4)

Notes: