

Motorised Mobility Devices

Fact Sheet 2

Choosing the right device

Road Safety Victoria (Department of Transport) has produced a series of fact sheets to support safe use of motorised scooters and powered wheelchairs in our community. This fact sheet describes the types of devices available and helps you to decide which type will best suit your needs. It includes a checklist, which we suggest you complete and share with your health professional and supplier so that they can assist you.

In this resource, the term 'motorised mobility device' includes both mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs, unless they are mentioned separately. Note that more detailed information about the types of devices and a range of other considerations is available in *A guide for choosing and using mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs*.

Most importantly:

- Take your time, get help and seek expert advice before you choose your device to make sure it meets your needs now and into the future.
- Try out the device before you buy, ideally in the environment where it will be used, including on public transport (see *Fact Sheet 5*). An occupational therapist can help you select the right device and can work with the supplier to ensure the device has the features you need.
- Once you choose the device, make sure you get suitable training so that you can use it safely and in a variety of environments. Again, an occupational therapist can provide this training.

Types of devices

Motorised mobility devices vary in design, size, features and price. It is also possible for the manufacturer or supplier to adjust some of the features (called 'customising'). An occupational therapist will be able to help you understand the different options and match the device to your personal needs. While some types of devices provide more stability than others, all devices can tip over if used incorrectly.



Powered wheelchairs

These devices are normally specifically recommended for a person by a health professional. This is because the person can spend many hours in the wheelchair. The chair needs to support their body weight and posture and help them undertake different activities.



Mobility scooters

There are various types and sizes of mobility scooters, including 3-wheel, 4-wheel and portable scooters.

Features and safety considerations

Suitability for travelling on public transport

Not all devices are suitable for use on public transport. There are size and weight limits as well as manoeuvrability requirements. Some modes of transport (taxis and coaches) also require the device to have anchor points to fix the device to the floor of the vehicle. Accessibility also varies depending on the type of transport. You can discuss these requirements with the supplier and your occupational therapist. For more information including the required dimensions for public transport see *Fact Sheet 5*.

Suitability for travelling in a wheelchair accessible taxi or transporting in your car

There are also size restrictions for travelling in a wheelchair accessible taxi, and the device must have anchor points fitted as described above. If you intend to transport the device in your car, or in a trailer, you will need to consider size, weight and the need for car modifications or equipment such as a hoist or ramp.

Headlights, taillights and reflectors

Headlights, taillights and reflectors are generally standard features on scooters to support visibility. Visibility features may also be installed on powered wheelchairs. If they are installed, it is a good idea to use the headlights during the day, particularly in overcast weather. Using a device at night, even with lights, is not recommended.

Visibility flag

A visibility flag is also advisable. The flag should be positioned on a pole at the back of the device.

Side mirror(s)

A side mirror helps you to see behind you. It will not allow you to see everything in your environment so you must also look around and behind you to check for pedestrians and traffic.

Tyres

Most mobility devices have pneumatic tyres. The pressure in these tyres needs to be checked regularly so consider whether you can maintain the tyres or whether you can get help to do that. Solid tyres require less maintenance but they provide less cushioning. They also provide less traction on rough terrain.

Carry bags

Most scooters have a small wire basket on the front for carrying small loads such as shopping. A rear carry bag can also be fitted to the back of the scooter. There is limited space on powered wheelchairs for carrying items. Never overload your mobility device as it can affect its stability.

Holder for other mobility aids on scooters

You may need to walk short distances to access shops and other buildings that are not scooter accessible. A holder can be mounted to the rear of the scooter so that you can carry your walking stick or frame with you. Make sure you can safely load and unload your mobility aid from the scooter.

Weather canopy for scooters

Weather canopies should be used with caution. In windy weather, a scooter with a canopy may become unstable. Canopies can also restrict your vision and ability to scan the environment. The added canopy height may also make public transport use more difficult.

Other things to consider

- Should you buy or hire?
- What about purchasing a second-hand device?
- What funding options are available?
- Does the device meet Australian Standards?
- Does the device comply with the Victorian Road Rules (Road Safety Road Rules 2017)?
- What about warranty, servicing and maintenance?
- Do you need insurance?
- What about breakdowns?

For more information, including the answers to these questions see the comprehensive *Guide to Choosing and Using Mobility Scooters and Powered Wheelchairs*.

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, 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

Checklist: Choosing the right device for you

If you have decided that a motorised mobility device is suitable for you, (see Fact Sheet 1—*Is a motorised mobility device right for you?*) you should now start to think about what type of device might be best. Complete the following checklist and share your answers with your health professional and supplier so that they can advise you. The checklist will help identify device features that suit your needs. This will help to narrow down your options so you can then trial suitable device(s) in the environments in which you plan to use the device. If you need to use a powered wheelchair, there are many more things you will need to think about than listed here: your occupational therapist will help you.

1 How do you plan to use your device?

a. What activities will you use your device for? Select all that apply:

- Going to the shops
- Visiting friends/family
- Going to doctors' appointments
- Generally moving around my community
- Other

b. How often do you think you will use your device?

- Every day
- Most days
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once per week

c. For the activities listed above, what distance would you need to travel from home? (including the return journey):

- Less than 1km
- 1 to 5km
- More than 5km
- Not sure

d. Do you plan to transport the device by car?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

e. Do you plan to use the device on public transport? Select all that apply:

- Metropolitan travel** Tram Train Bus
- Regional travel** Train Coach

f. Do you plan to take your device in a taxi?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

g. Do you plan to take the device on a plane/ cruise ship?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

2 What type of terrain will you need to travel on?

a. Where will you mainly use your device?

- Mainly indoors
- Mainly outdoors
- Both indoors and outdoors

b. What types of outdoor surfaces might you travel on? Select all that apply:

- Footpaths
- Bricks or pavers
- Gravel or unmade surfaces
- Grass
- Other

c. Will you need to travel up or down slopes?

Select all that apply:

- Steep slopes
- Gentle slopes
- Level surfaces

d. Will you need to negotiate kerbs or gutters?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

e. Will you need to travel over train or tram tracks (e.g. negotiate railway crossings or cross roads with trams)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

3 What about storing your device?

a. Do you have a secure, accessible under-cover storage area?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

b. Is there a power point in the storage area for battery charging?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

4 What else do you need to think about?

a. Do you have difficulty using your arms or hands (e.g. gripping, feeling objects, stretching your arms out in front)?

- Yes
- No

b. Do you have difficulty keeping your legs/feet in a comfortable position (e.g. involuntary movements, reduced foot sensation)?

- Yes
- No

c. Do you need support to keep upright, comfortable and stable in the seat?

- Yes
- No

d. Do you need to carry a walking aid on your device (stick, frame, walker)?

- Yes
- No

e. Do you need to carry shopping or other items (e.g. oxygen) on the device?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

The provision of this guide to consumers/carers is not sufficient, nor does it constitute or replace, adequate user assessment and training as would be provided by an AHPRA registered health professional.