

Equipment and Seating

Sitting Posture

Weakened core muscles in people with spinal cord injury promote a slouched sitting posture with a curved spine and rounded shoulders. This can lead to:

- Tight joints and muscles in the hips, spine and shoulders
- Pain and limitations when reaching overhead
- Neck and shoulder pain from unusual positions and forces when pushing a wheelchair with this posture
- Extra pressure on the tail bone and low back, increasing the risk for skin breakdown

Finding your optimal alignment in your wheelchair is possible with input from a skilled occupational or physical therapist specializing in wheelchairs and spinal cord injury.



Poor posture - slouched



Good posture - upright

Bathroom Equipment

People with SCI often sit for prolonged periods on bathing and toileting-related chairs or benches. This increased the risk for skin breakdown if the equipment is not appropriately fitted for your needs. An occupational therapist that specializes in SCI is an excellent resource to guide you through the process of selecting appropriate bathroom equipment that will protect your skin and optimize your posture and mobility.

Adjusting or Replacing a Wheelchair

Trying out and ordering a custom manual or power wheelchair, or adjusting your wheelchair can be a complex process. Physical and occupational therapists who specialize in "wheelchair seating" can work with you over your lifetime to ensure that your ongoing wheelchair needs are fully met.

Progressing Manual Wheelchair Skills

Being able to do a safe and independent wheelie in a manual wheelchair is a foundational skill for a person with a spinal cord injury. Learning how to perform wheelies safely from a skilled PT or OT will increase your confidence and independence with crossing thresholds and managing steep slopes, potholes, and grassy surfaces in your wheelchair.

Wheelchair Cushions

One of the critical components of a wheelchair for a person with spinal cord injury is a specialized cushion that is kept in good condition. While a large array of products exist, no single cushion is the best choice for all users. Follow-up regularly with your physical or occupational therapist to ensure that your cushion promotes healthy skin and an upright posture.

Resources:

For patients:

- Smith EC and Wakefield HL.(2016, May 12). *Customize Your Ride: Demystifying Manual Wheelchair Features*. Retrieved from http://sci.washington.edu/info/forums/reports/wheelchair_custom.asp
- Hastings J. (2013, April 9). *Tips for Choosing the Right Wheelchair*. Retrieved from http://sci.washington.edu/info/forums/reports/wheelchair_choosing.asp
- Empowerment Project Video Series about Wheelchair Skills at <http://sci.washington.edu/empowerment/videos.asp#wc>
- Hastings J.(2011, November 11). *What about Cushions?* Retrieved from <http://sci.washington.edu/info/forums/reports/cushions.asp>

Authors:

Elisa Smith, PT, DPT, NCS
UW Medicine SCI Core Group

Maria Regina Reyes, MD- Editor/Project Director

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

The SCI Empowerment Project is funded by a grant from the **Craig H. Neilsen Foundation** to the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

