

Using a Power Wheelchair

Position and Pressure Relief



THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY

WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

To prevent discomfort and skin breakdown while using a power wheelchair:

- Keep a good position.
- Do regular pressure relief.
- Check your skin daily for changes in color or redness.
- Check your cushion regularly and follow general cushion care tips.

Follow the instructions in this handout and those given to you by your healthcare team to prevent discomfort and skin breakdown while using a power wheelchair.

How to position yourself

After transferring to your wheelchair, sit with your hips as far back in the seat as possible.

- ☑ Use the tilt and recline features to do this, making sure your hips are all the way back in the seat.
- ☑ Use your seat belt to help keep your hips in a good position.
- ☑ Check your knee position. The back of your knees should touch the cushion.
- ☑ Because it is common to move or slide in your wheelchair over time, reposition yourself in the wheelchair every 2 hours.



Correct knee position

How to do pressure relief

While in your wheelchair (or any seated or lying position), do pressure relief for 2 minutes, every 20 minutes to improve blood flow to areas under pressure, such as your bottom, hips, and legs. This helps to prevent pressure sores or ulcers.

Follow these steps to do pressure relief:



1. Tilt your body back. You will have the most pressure relief at full tilt.



2. Recline the backrest to ease pressure on your bottom and hips. The more combined tilt and recline you can safely use, the better pressure relief you will get.



3. Raise the leg rests to ease swelling.

2 minutes



4. Stay in this position for at least 2 minutes to ease pressure on your bottom, hips, and legs.

To prevent sliding forward and wheelchair friction, follow these steps to sit back up:



1. Lower the legs back down.
2. Bring the seat back out of the reclined position.
3. Tilt the wheelchair forward.
4. Repeat every 20 minutes for at least 2 minutes. Set a timer to remind you.

Skin checks

Check your skin daily for changes in color or redness, especially on your bottom and hips. Color changes should go away after 15 minutes or less when you are out of the wheelchair. Skin that has a color change should always turn white when you press down on it.

Your cushion

Check your cushion regularly:

- Air-filled cushion: Check that the cushion is inflated well weekly. Education from your therapist and online videos tutorials are great resources.
- Gel-filled cushion: Check that the gel is well distributed daily, so high pressure areas, such as under your sit bones, have enough gel to prevent pressure. Watch for leaks with age.
- Foam-filled cushion: Little care is needed, but watch for loss of shape, cracks, or tears.

Follow these general care tips:

- Replace your cushion every 3 years or as needed. Contact your insurance company and ask how often they pay to replace cushions. Many replace every 3 years.
- Contact your vendor if your cushion needs to be repaired or replaced.
- Contact your therapist if you have positioning concerns, or feel discomfort or a lack of support.
- Wash your cushion cover regularly. Do not put it in the dryer.

Contact your therapist at Outpatient Rehabilitation Assistive Technology at 614-685-5600, if you have any safety concerns or if you have tipped or fallen from your wheelchair.

Make yearly follow-up appointments with your therapist and vendor to be sure your wheelchair is well-maintained and regularly adjusted.