

Wheelchair - Selecting a Manual Wheelchair

New Mexico

The importance of a wheelchair

For people with limited mobility, a wheelchair allows them to interact with society. It is a tool of empowerment to grant individuals the independence to go to work, buy groceries, socialize, study etc. Without this tool, they are significantly limited and are often left in isolation. Selecting a wheelchair that meets an individual's needs is crucial to insuring the best quality of life for that individual.

Manual wheelchairs

For people with upper body strength, they may choose a manual chair meaning they propel the chair themselves. This is done by pushing on handrails, which would be found on most chairs, or levers. There are several types of manual wheelchairs currently available.

Types of manual wheelchairs

- **Basic wheelchairs** are some of the most affordable chairs and can fit an average person up to 300 pounds. They fold and weigh between 38 and 42 pounds, which can be heavy, and difficult to load in and out of vehicles.
- **Transport wheelchairs** are usually made of a folding frame and four caster wheels. These chairs are designed to be pushed by someone else. These chairs are good for those who do not need a chair full time. This type may be used in hospitals.
- **Heavy-duty wheelchairs** are designed for larger individuals ranging from 300 to 700 pounds. Seats can reach up to 30 inches and can weigh 38 to 98 pounds.
- **Lightweight wheelchairs** are similar to a basic wheelchair, in that they are lightweight and can support someone up to 300 pounds. They are highly customizable making them ideal for individuals who need their chair for extended use. They usually have a rigid frame, meaning the chair does not fold, which allows the rider to have more force into the forward motion of the chair. Lightweight chairs weigh between 27 and 37 pounds, and the wheels may be quick-release, allowing for easy removal of the wheels to allow for easier storage.
- **Ultralight wheelchairs** give the highest performance and customization because, like the lightweight wheelchair, they need to be fitted to the user. Since they are some of the lightest chairs available, beginning at 14 pounds, they require less force to propel and are designed to fit the individual's body making the chair sleeker.

What to know before selecting a manual wheelchair

- Will someone be pushing the individual?
- Can the individual propel the chair themselves?
- What is their height and weight?
- How much time will they spend in the chair?
- How often will the user transport their chair?
- How will they transport their chair?



How to Choose a Manual Wheelchair:

<https://www.spinlife.com/en/HowToChooseAManualWheelchair.cfm>

Selecting the Right Wheelchair:

<https://www.christopherreeve.org/living-with-paralysis/wheelchairs/how-to-pick-the-right-wheelchair-for-you>

Choosing a Power Wheelchair:

<https://motioncares.ca/article/choosing-electric-wheelchair-what-consider>

Department of Health Seating Clinic:

DDSD Specialty Clinic

505-232-5726

<https://nmhealth.org/about/dsd/pgsv/clinical/specialty/seating/>

Carrie Tingley:

Outpatient Services

505-272-5200

Questions?

Call the CDD Information Network

1-800-552-8195

or visit our website at <https://goto.unm.edu/x8gmt>

More Informational Tip Sheets:

<https://goto.unm.edu/>