



Choosing a Mobility Scooter or Electric Wheelchair / Powerchair

Overview

There are a number of things to think about when choosing a motorised mobility aid such as a mobility scooter or electric wheelchair. This guide will address some of the questions that arise.

When should I get a motorised mobility aid?

This is a very personal decision. There is a common stereotype that people who use wheelchairs (electric or otherwise) or mobility scooters are completely unable to walk and there are often stigmatised representations of using wheelchairs or mobility scooters. A wheelchair or mobility scooter is simply a tool to enable you to live a more independent life. Nina Tame is a disabled influencer on Instagram who puts it very simply and clearly. She says “If you think you need a mobility aid then you need a mobility aid”. You may be assessed by your local wheelchair services or occupational therapy department or you may simply find that your ability to get out and about is far more limited than you would like. It is important to continue to exercise to your best ability if have some walking ability but you can make more choices about where you exercise if you are more mobile.

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What are the factors in considering what I need?

Where do I want to use it?

Will I use it indoors, outdoors or both? How far do I want to travel on it? Electric wheelchairs or powerchairs can usually be used indoors and outdoors where mobility scooters tend to be for the outdoors and the larger mobility scooters are actually road vehicles.

What are my personal physical requirements?

These include things like

- Your weight.
- Your manual dexterity. Physical considerations in control of the chair/scooter such as if you are able to use only one hand then you need to factor that into your choice of design. Or for a portable scooter/chair – does it fold easily or can I easily take it to pieces?
- Will I need to lift or move the chair or scooter myself? Does the design and weight of the chair or scooter allow me to do that?



- How much strength or balance do I need? Generally you will need more core strength, balance and manual dexterity for a mobility scooter than a powerchair or electric wheelchair.
- Do I want to walk sometimes like you might do using a scooter to go to shops or will I stay on it all the time? Do I need to carry a stick/s or crutches?
- What do I need to be comfortable? Do I need a fully ergonomic seat with arm rests or am I ok with something more basic?

Characteristics of the scooter or chair

- Portable or not? If portable, is it to enable you to put it in a car or to take on public transport or both?
- Storage space? How much space is needed to store it?
- Charging? What space is needed to charge your scooter or wheelchair? Can you remove the battery and charge it out of the scooter or chair? This is an important consideration as some places have begun to stop people charging mobility scooters in shared spaces so if you have a removable battery then you can still charge it indoors if rules change where you are. There may be some kinds of accommodation where you are not allowed to store mobility scooters or charge them at all so you need to check rules.
- Will you be transporting it independently and can you manage every part of that process?
- Will you use it as a road vehicle or only on pavements?

More information on use on pavement and road.

Wheeled mobility equipment comes in different legal classes. Class 1 is the category for manual wheelchairs – either transit chairs or self propelled wheelchairs. Electric equipment comes in two classes called Class 2 and Class 3. Class 2 Powerchairs or electric wheelchairs and mobility scooters can go at speeds up to 4 miles per hour in the UK and are legal for travel on pavements only except where there is no pavement and you can use them on the road. Class 3 mostly includes mobility scooters but there are some Class 3 Powerchairs. These can legally travel on the road and on the pavement. It is only legal to travel up to 4 miles per hour on pavement but these scooters can go up to 8 miles per hour on the road (or 12.8 km/h).

Class 2 scooters/powerchairs do not need to be registered but Class 3 mobility scooters or chairs do. You can read more about the rules and registration here:

<https://www.gov.uk/mobility-scooters-and-powered-wheelchairs-rules/vehicle-tax-registration-and-insurance>



I know what my requirements are. What do I do now?

Research

If you have access to the internet then a good look around to see what models may fit your requirements can be really helpful. If you don't have access yourself but a friend, relative or carer can help then do ask them. Ideally you want to know what each machine weighs if you will need to lift it, where you can find one to try and also what the reviews say about it. Read both positive and negative reviews if you can and check on any reviews of the company supplying it. You can find reviews of companies and their customer service here:

<https://uk.trustpilot.com/>

Test Drive

Do see if you can find a mobility store near you or that you can access to try out the models of scooters you are interested in. It is only by test driving your mobility scooter or wheelchair that you can truly know if it will meet your needs. Even if you are buying a second-hand wheelchair or scooter then do try out the same model in a shop if you can.

This is not always easy as many companies selling mobility equipment have no base in Scotland and even if they do have Scottish showrooms, these are only in one or two locations in Scotland. Some companies may bring equipment to you to try out but this is less likely in the budget end of the price range.

What can you do if you can't test drive the model that you think will suit your needs best?

One thing you can do is look at specific features of the equipment and try out similar equipment. So look at how the scooter or chair is steered for example, and try out other models which have similar steering such as joystick or handle bars and see how you get on. Make sure you know what seating measurements you need and try chairs or scooters with similar looking seats. This can give you a general idea but is not a substitute for checking the actual chair itself.

If you are not able to try out the exact model before purchase then check with the company about their policy on returns should you find that it doesn't work for you.

Funding

Motability

If you are in receipt of a disability benefit with a mobility component then you may be able to use this to rent a mobility scooter or powered wheelchair from **Motability** (<https://www.motability.co.uk/>) The scheme allows eligible people to lease either a car or a mobility scooter.



NHS

If your mobility is severely impaired you may be eligible for an electric wheelchair through NHS wheelchair services. You can find out about the kind of criteria they use for eligibility by reading this **patient guide** (<https://www.retis.scot.nhs.uk/wheelchaircriteria>) produced by NHS Scotland.

You will not need to do the same research if you are being assessed for one by the NHS as they will determine your requirements and choose the model for you.

Grants

If you are not eligible for a mobility scooter from Motability or for an NHS Powerchair/electric wheelchair then you may be able to get a grant to cover the costs of mobility equipment. Possible sources include the ones below. In most cases you will need a third party to complete the application for you such as a health professional or a Citizen's Advice advisor. You can find details on the webpages of the grant funders.

Independence at Home here <https://independenceathome.org.uk/>

Hospital Saturday Fund here <https://hospitalsaturdayfund.org/>

Barchester Charitable Foundation here <https://www.bhcfoundation.org.uk/>

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