

## Remember...

Please contact your wheelchair service for urgent review if:

- There is a change in your medical condition such as heart problems, breathing problems, blackouts, seizures, stroke, amputation, considerable weight gain/loss etc. so we can check if the equipment on loan to you is still suitable for use
- The equipment and/or accessories are lost or damaged
- You change your address
- You intend taking the equipment abroad on holiday
- You intend to leave the country permanently
- You no longer require the equipment



### East Berkshire Specialist Mobility Service

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**NHS**

**Berkshire Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Powered wheelchairs...

## Guidelines for safe use



## Types of powered wheelchair?

There are two main types of powered wheelchair, those for indoor use only and those which can be used both indoors and outdoors. Outdoor powered wheelchairs are classified by the DVLA as class 2 vehicles with a maximum speed of 4mph. This means that they can be used on footpaths, pedestrian zones and on roadways when no footpath is available.

Powered wheelchairs are strictly forbidden on motorways and their use is strongly discouraged on roads with fast moving traffic. You do not require a licence or permit for a class 2 vehicle.

Please do not use an indoor powered wheelchair out of doors on a regular basis – it is not designed to withstand the climate and environment that it will encounter.



### Please Note

It is important to remember that powered wheelchairs don't make much noise when in motion, and generally travel faster than the average walking pace and weigh approximately 100kgs or more. Always consider these factors when using your powered wheelchair in busy pedestrian areas.

## General safety precautions

Always refer first to the chair **official user manual**. Some general recommendations are:

- Always ensure that power is switched off before entering or leaving your wheelchair
- Before you move off check that your battery is showing a full charge and make sure you are familiar with all the controls
- Make sure you know how to dis-engage the motors and put the chair in manual mode in case the chair breaks down and needs to be pushed. **Refer to official user manual**
- Please ensure you feel in full control of the wheelchair before taking it outdoors. It is also advisable to get used to a low level of speed prior increasing to the maximum speed
- Choose a speed level appropriate for your environment
- It is not advisable to drive across wet grass or muddy terrain or across deep gravel as your chair may get stuck and you may have to call for assistance
- Please make sure you have read the whole of your wheelchair user manual and heed all the warnings and limitations

## Getting ready to drive

- Operate the on/off switch. The battery gauge will blink then remain on after a couple of seconds. This allows the system to self-check and is a safety feature to prevent unintended movement
- Check that the maximum speed is set to a level which suits you
- Push the joystick to control the speed and direction of the wheelchair, release the joystick to stop
- To steer, move the joystick in the direction you wish to go. The further you move the joystick, the faster you will go
- The brakes will automatically stop the wheelchair, from any speed, when the joystick is released

## Whilst driving

### Negotiating gradients / slopes

- Always refer to the **official user manual** supplied with your wheelchair for the maximum safe slope that your wheelchair is suited for
- Do not attempt to climb or descend slopes that are in excess of these figures
- Before negotiating a gradient please ensure that you are wearing your seat belt and/or harness if you have one
- Do not attempt to climb a slope when your seat is tilted back or reclined as it may unbalance the chair and it could tip back
- When descending a slope it is okay to have a small amount of rearward tilt or recline on your seat as it will help your balance but once you are on the level your seat needs to be made upright again
- If the wheelchair fails to climb a ramp and stalls mid-way through the manoeuvre **DO NOT** attempt to turn the wheelchair to drive back down in a forward facing direction. Reverse slowly and steadily and seek assistance if someone is present

### Seat Tilt

- Before using the seat tilt function ensure that the immediate area around the wheelchair is clear of possible obstructions and potential hazards, e.g. small children and pets
- Operating the seat tilt will limit the drive speed of the wheelchair

### CAUTION!

Never attempt to climb or descend an incline where the surface is rough, wet or slippery (gravel, loose chippings, grass, rain, black ice, snow etc.).

## Negotiating Kerbs

When approaching footpaths wherever possible mount and dismount the footpaths via ramps or lowered kerbs. Your power chair should be able to overcome a 5cm (2" approx.) high kerb without the use of a kerb climber device.

If your wheelchair is fitted with a kerb climber it should enable the chair to climb a 10cm (4" approx.) high kerb. Please consult your **official user manual** before attempting to negotiate kerbs as your manual will tell you what height kerb your chair is capable of negotiating and what to look out for.

**In general**, before negotiating a kerb ensure that you are wearing your seat belt and/or harness. Approach the kerb slowly head on and stop as soon as the front wheels are about to make contact with the kerb, then push the joystick forward until both front and rear wheels have climbed the kerb. Do not approach or try to mount the kerb at an angle as it might result in the chair tipping sideways.

### Please note:

Before negotiating kerbs ensure the following:

1. Always approach the kerb head on and not at an angle
2. Try not to allow the wheelchair to come to a halt midway through the manoeuvre
3. Do not attempt to climb kerbs or gradients with the backrest reclined/tilted to any degree
4. Do not attempt to descend kerbs greater than 7cm (approx. 3 inches) always look for a ramp or lowered kerb. Consult your chair's **official user manual** for specific information on descending kerbs

## Sharp turns

Full speed turns should not be attempted. If you need to turn sharply you must reduce your speed with the joystick or speed setting. This is particularly important when travelling across or down a slope. Disregarding this advice could lead to your wheelchair tipping over.

## Breakdowns

It is highly recommended that you make an emergency plan of action in case you ever do break down whilst away from home. The most common cause of breakdowns is loss of power due to flat batteries. If you do suffer a breakdown seek the assistance of your carer or a passer-by, and explain where to find the motor disengagement lever. Ask the assistant to switch the levers to freewheel/manual, so that the powered wheelchair can be pushed by hand and moved.

### **DANGER!**

**When the motor levers are disengaged the chair will be in freewheel mode and will not have an automatic brake so the motor levers should be re-engaged as soon as possible or the chair will be at risk of rolling on a steep incline.**

Once in a safe place call the approved repairer service for assistance, they will try to assist on a best endeavours basis. You will most likely need to call a wheelchair friendly taxi service or family and friends to assist you in getting home safely.

## Insurance...

### What about insurance?

As a wheelchair user you need to be aware of the risks involved to both yourself and other road users. Many power wheelchair users do not realise that they may be held liable in certain cases where a third party gets injured by their power chair. We strongly recommend that you take out 'Third-Party Liability' insurance to cover against any possible claims that may arise.

If you already have some other insurance policy, ask your insurer about getting cover for your power chair.

### Looking after your powered wheelchair

Your powered wheelchair gives you freedom and mobility, therefore it is important to look after it. Your powered wheelchair is comprised of electrically operated parts. Please store it indoors and try to keep it as clean as possible and make sure the batteries are charged regularly overnight. Refer to the **official user manual** for more specific information on cleaning and charging.

**For all repairs, faults and servicing please contact our approved repairer, currently Millbrook Healthcare,**

**Tel: 0333 234 0303**

