

Always plan your route

- Plan your route by considering potential obstacles. Is it possible to avoid narrow doors and corridors, steps, low branches, slippery floors and steep footpaths?
- When there is snow or ice on the ground, controlling the wheelchair will take significantly more effort and the attendant or user must take this into account to ensure they can manage in these conditions.
- Pushing a wheelchair up a long, steep slope may mean the attendant has to stop and rest, which in turn demands an additional effort to start back upwards again.
- Stopping a wheelchair on a steep downward slope also demands effort and control.
- Surface conditions need to be considered when deciding which outdoor route to take.
- Wheelchairs do not travel over muddy grass, gravel or sand.
- Manoeuvres which demand over-exertion create risk of injury and should be avoided.

East Berkshire Specialist Wheelchair Service

3 Abell Gardens, Maidenhead, SL6 6PS

Tel: **0118 904 3222**

berkseast.mobility@berkshire.nhs.uk



How to use a wheelchair safely

Using a **wheelchair** and assisting **wheelchair users** guide



Safety checks

Regularly check the wheelchair to ensure it is in **good working order**.

- Check the seat canvas isn't sagging or worn, the cushion is correctly positioned, and the tyres have tread.
- If it has pneumatic tyres, check these are properly inflated. The wheelchair should roll easily when pushed.
- The anti-tippers and seat belt / harness should be in place. Check these for any signs of wear and tear.
- If adjustable height push handles are fitted, ensure they are securely attached.

Loading a wheelchair into your car

- Your wheelchair is a heavy piece of equipment, please take care when lifting it.
- If the footplates are detachable, take them off and place them into your car.
- If the armrests are detachable, take them off and put them in the car.
- Pull the seat rails up and together to fold the wheelchair.
- To make the wheelchair even smaller, lower the backrest by pressing on the latches along the backrest posts. Not all wheelchairs will have this facility.
- Remove the large quick-release wheels (if your wheelchair has them).
- Lift the wheelchair into the car.
- If you place the wheelchair on the back seat, hold it in place with a seat belt.

Opening the wheelchair

Stand in front of the chair and push down on the sides of the seat canvas with your hands pointing inwards until the chair is fully opened. **Never put your fingers between the frame and the seat.**

Getting into a wheelchair

The following should be adhered to for self-transfer and assisted transfer:

- Make sure the brakes are on, and the footrests are flipped up. On some models, footrests can be swung away for easier access.
- If assisting with transfer, the wheelchair user should hold onto the armrests to provide support whilst being lowered into the seat. To avoid injury, the wheelchair user should never hold the assistant round the neck while being lowered into the chair.
- Once sat comfortably in the chair, move the footplates into position.
- If applicable, make sure the heel loops are at the back of the heels to prevent feet slipping off the footplates.
- Fasten the seat belt and any harnesses.



Before you set off

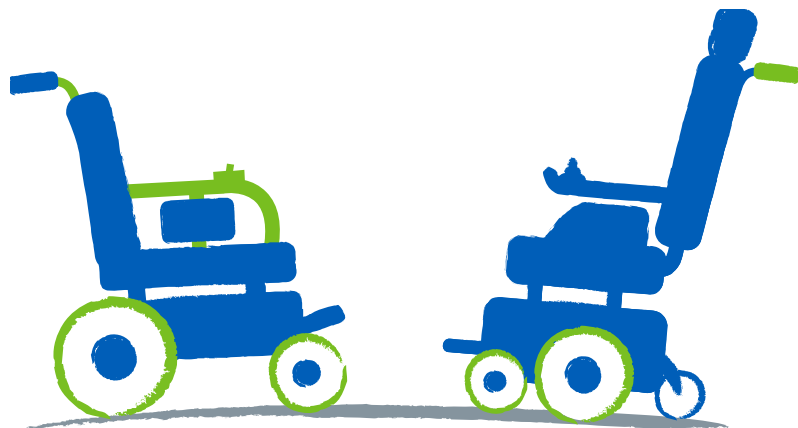
Make sure that the wheelchair user is comfortable and that clothes, rugs, covers etc. will not catch in the wheels or interfere with the general workings of the wheelchair.

Please note:

Shopping bags or **other heavy loads** should **not** be carried on a **wheelchair** unless specifically designed for the purpose. **Hanging items** on the push handles can **overload the chair** and affect **stability**. **There is a risk of the chair tipping backwards**.

Getting out of a wheelchair

- Make sure the brakes are on, then flip up the footrests and swing them away if you have this facility.
- The occupant should place a hand on each armrest, bend slightly forward and place both feet well back and firmly on the ground, then push upwards to assist the carer. Carers should not lift a wheelchair user out of a wheelchair.



Getting up and down kerbs (attendant propelled wheelchairs)

Getting up and down kerbs and small steps can be dangerous. Always look for a ramp or dropped kerb first. If there is no other way, always keep control of the wheelchair and remember the wheelchair user's safety and comfort.

When pushing, be close to the wheelchair, have a straight back and push with your whole bodyweight and leg muscles. Keep your arms near your body and your elbows bent. Try not to twist to look behind you whilst moving.

Getting up a kerb

- Position the wheelchair so that the front wheels almost touch the kerb. Tell the occupant you are about to tip her/him.
- Grip the push handles firmly and put one foot on the tip assist.
- Push down on the tip assist and pull the push handles toward you, balancing the wheelchair on its back wheels.
- Push the wheelchair forward until both front wheels are on the pavement and roll the wheelchair forward.
- When the back wheels touch the kerb, continue to roll the wheelchair forward onto the pavement, keeping the wheels in constant contact with the kerb, i.e., don't lift the back wheels off the ground.

Getting down a kerb

- Position the wheelchair so that the front wheels face the kerb squarely.
- Put one foot on the tip assist and grip the push handles firmly.
- Push down on the tip assist and push handles.
- Balance the wheelchair on its back wheels and move it forward. Tip it back for as short a time as possible. Keep close to the wheelchair and keep your hands firmly on the push handles.
- Slide the back wheels down the kerb, while supporting some of the wheelchair's weight yourself. Keep the front wheels up.
- Make sure both back wheels touch the ground as gently as possible, and at the same time. Then lower the front wheels.
- Taking the wheelchair down backwards may be easier for heavier users and older helpers. But keep a look out for traffic if you are coming down backwards into a road.
- Take care not to hit the user's feet on the kerb.
- Never tip the wheelchair forward.

Please note: Attendant propelled wheelchairs

- Be aware if you are pushing a wheelchair, you will be positioned behind the user. This can make hearing the user or being heard by the user difficult. If possible, stop the chair put the brake on and walk round to face the user so you can both be seen and heard.
- The same would apply when stopping to chat to others to ensure the wheelchair user isn't excluded.

Using a wheelchair – dos and don'ts

Do:

- ✓ Apply both brakes before getting in or out.
- ✓ Pick the wheelchair up by its frame, not the armrests, as they may be loose.
- ✓ Be mindful of the anti-tippers if they protrude beyond the frame of the chair.
- ✓ Use ramps and dropped kerbs when available.
- ✓ Use tip assist as well as push handles when negotiating kerbs.
- ✓ Ensure the seat belt is fastened if not in use, to avoid it catching in the wheels.
- ✓ Be alert for drains, roadwork hazards and other obstacles which could potentially trap the wheels.
- ✓ Be aware the camber of the pavement will affect the movement of the wheelchair.
- ✓ Make sure that you and the person to be pushed in the wheelchair are wearing shoes that are properly fitted and won't slip.
- ✓ Be aware of the weight limit of the wheelchair.

Don't -

- ✗ Carry bags suspended from push handles.
- ✗ Stand on the footplates to get in or out of the wheelchair.
- ✗ Use the brakes to stop a moving chair.