



## Information about Wheelchairs

A wheelchair isn't just a wheelchair anymore. A generation ago, the word "wheelchair" conjured up the image of a boxy, shiny steel frame and vinyl upholstery. Now there are almost as many wheelchair styles, colors, and options available as there are children to use them.

### Selecting a Wheelchair - The Basics

- The first consideration in selecting the appropriate chair is the child's needs based on his or her age, disabilities, and abilities.
- How much support the chair must provide, how it will be propelled, and what special features and adaptations are needed.
- Decisions such as these determine whether the child uses a manual chair, powered chair or a wheelchair alternative, and whether special seating systems or supports are needed.
- Will it be used primarily indoors or outdoors?
- Will it be used for play, in the home, in school, or in a combination of settings?
- Will the chair need to be transported? If so, how will it be transported - in a van, a car, or by some form of public transportation?
- Are there stairs or other barriers to be considered?
- Finally, the child's personal tastes and interests should also be considered. A wheelchair is not simply something a child needs to use; it is an extension of his or her personality

**Manual wheelchairs** are available in several types and styles for children. Most are propelled by the user's arm, but some chairs with a lower, or hemi, frame are designed to be propelled by the user's legs. Manual chairs range in price from approximately \$1,000 for a basic chair to more than \$5,000 for a customized lightweight chair.



**Child/Junior/Growing wheelchairs** are designed to meet the needs of children as they change and grow. Because of the high cost of replacing a chair, and because insurance providers often place limitations on how frequently chairs may be replaced, purchasing a new chair each year can be financially prohibitive, if not impossible. Growth chairs or chairs with growth kits allow adjustments to be made in the existing chair to accommodate a growing child.



### **Lightweight Wheelchairs**

Lightweight wheelchairs have frames made of lighter materials such as aluminum, titanium, or chrome. Originally developed for racing and wheelchair sports, these chairs have become increasingly popular as daily use chairs because they offer a sportier appearance and independence of movement with minimum effort, and are easier to transport. Lightweight chairs typically weigh less than 30 pounds without leg rests and/or wheels. Some models have folding frames, some have rigid frames, and a few offer a choice of frame styles.

### **Sport Wheelchairs**

Sport wheelchairs come in a variety of configurations designed for specific sporting activities. For example, one model designed for the use in wheelchair contact sports such as wheelchair rugby or football features a wide front-end "hammer-head" made of aluminum tubing. Other popular sport configurations include racing and basketball chairs. All-terrain chairs have rugged frame and wheels that can roll safely over many unpaved and irregular surfaces. Many sport wheelchair manufacturers offer custom design, including custom children's sizes.

### **Standing Wheelchairs**

A child who needs or wants assistance to stand may be interested in a standing wheelchair, a manual or powered wheelchair equipped with a power lift to raise the



child to a standing position.

### **Reclining/Tilt-In-Space Wheelchairs**

Reclining wheelchairs and tilt-in-space wheelchairs are available for children unable to sit upright for sustained periods or who need to change position without leaving their chair.

### **Powered Wheelchairs**

It was once thought that children lacked the necessary skills to use a powered chair, and that using a powered chair might inhibit the development of other skills. More current research indicates - as with any other new skill - supervised practice enables children to operate powered chairs successfully and that for some children, using these chairs is actually a benefit in conserving energy and increasing self-esteem for the development of other skills.



## **Scooters**

Scooters are powered three-wheeled carts with seats. They are available in smaller sizes for children and small adults. With a price range of approximately \$1,500 to \$3,500, these are somewhat less expensive alternatives to manual or powered wheelchairs, but not all wheelchair users will be able to use scooters. Scooters generally require good upper body strength and arm function; users should also be able to support themselves in an upright, seated position for an extended period of time.



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