



A Word About Wheelchairs

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Wheelchair technology, like all technology, has exploded since the days of the wicker chair on wheels that we see in movies about “the old days”. There are many types of wheelchairs....

Types of wheelchairs

- Regular wheelchairs
- Oversize wheelchairs for larger individuals
- Power wheelchairs with sophisticated electronics
- Transport wheelchairs built for occasional use (light in weight, used for example in hospitals for transporting patients)

- Sport wheelchairs of many different kinds for different sports
- And other types of wheelchairs for special purposes

Handling a Wheelchair

A wheelchair may be a precision crafted piece of equipment and must be handled with great care – when they need to be handled. Find out details from the wheelchair user if the wheelchair must be handled for any reason. For example if a wheelchair is to be stowed in the trunk of a car find out from the passenger exactly how to remove foot-rests, assuming that is necessary. Don't pull on the arms of the chair – many are detachable and may inadvertently come off. Remember that wheelchairs can be very expensive – up to and beyond \$6000 to buy and costly to replace. Even more important the wheelchair is critical to the individual who uses it.

Pushing a Wheelchair

Once again it is most important to find out from the wheelchair user exactly what assistance is needed. Generally speaking, be sure the person you are pushing has given his permission and is in communication with you. Be sure you are attentive to his instructions when you are pushing. If you need to go over a curb or bump, roll the chair backwards taking care the person is secure (you have him firmly) and that he feels secure and confident in your care. Remember to remain in communication about anything you do to move the person in order to avoid startling or suprising him and to maintain safety.

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Health Issues

A person who uses a wheelchair obviously has difficulty walking, but it may not be obvious that he may have other health issues as well. In the riveting book Just An Accident, author Amy Montgomery tells the true story of 33 year old Adirondack logger Scott Remington whose life changed in a moment following a tragic accident. Scott's subsequent paralysis not only mandated his use of a wheelchair but created myriad other health problems including with his breathing, bladder and bowel control. His account of achieving a "new normal" tells of the many accommodations he has had to make following his accident and underscores for those of us who are able bodied that a wheelchair user may manage many more day to day challenges than we are at all aware of.