



Things to Think About!

Check It Out

By Brandan Atkin

For more information regarding various wheelchairs, their features and costs contact your local medical equipment supplier/dealer. Consider contacting the manufacturer directly with more detailed questions. Most companies have Internet sites or Customer Service numbers for more information for new buyers.



Purchasing A Power Wheelchair

By Linda Jorgensen

Children are beginning to use power chairs at a much earlier age. Our daughter received her first power chair 16 years ago at age 5. Many children today are moving into power chairs as early as age 2 depending on their level of development and physical capability.

Purchasing a power wheelchair can be a daunting experience. During a recent visit to a wheelchair clinic a parent was overheard saying, "It would be easier to buy a car by committee"! To say the process can be complicated and frustrating is an understatement.

There are several steps parents can take to make the process much simpler, less frustrating and successful.

Do your homework.

1. Talk to your child's Physician, Physical or Occupational Therapist. Most therapists will have some idea of the type of power chair appropriate to your child.
2. Talk to other parents whose children use power chairs. Ask questions:
 - What brand of chair are they using?
 - Do they like it?
 - What features are most helpful?
 - Is it easy to use and maintain? If not, what problems are they having?
 - Who helped them make the purchase? Were they happy with the service?
3. Browse online user groups for user information.
4. Browse manufacturer sites. Read about the different types of equipment and features currently available. These change quite often. Don't be afraid to contact company representatives with questions.

Find a reputable, knowledgeable therapist and dealer in your area.

It is important to find a trained therapist who specializes in Assistive Technology. These individuals can be hard to find. You can usually find them in larger specialty hospitals and clinics attached to pediatric facilities. Call the facility information number and ask if they offer a wheelchair or mobility clinic. If so, they can generally recommend a knowledgeable dealer.

***Tip:** Contact your State Department of Consumer Protection and find out if the dealer you are thinking of working with has had any consumer complaints filed.

Contact your insurance carrier.

Contact your insurance carrier's customer service representative, case manager, or general information number to ensure you are using a facility and dealer covered by your policy. If you are having difficulty finding someone in your area they may also be able to recommend one.

- Find out exactly what your policy will, and won't, cover.
- Ask what forms, letters etc. they would like you to submit.

Attend a fitting appointment

Be sure you are working with a knowledgeable therapist and a reputable, experienced dealer (A therapist who does wheelchair assessments on a regular basis is preferred).

This visit may be a single visit with simple recommendations or a series of several appointments to explore various options available.

It may be necessary to try a variety of equipment. Many dealers will allow the consumer to try a "loaner" chair for a few days. Ask questions about the various chairs and features you are considering.

- Try the wheelchair in your vehicle. Is it easily transportable or will you need a lift conversion?
- Use the wheelchair in the spaces in your home. Will you need to install a ramp? Can your child maneuver through their bedroom, the bathroom, and family spaces?
- Contact your child's school. Do they have accessible bussing available? Will your child be able to access the restroom? The classroom?

It is important to ensure the chair will work well within the surroundings it will be used in routinely.

After the Appointment

Once your assessment has been completed the supplier/dealer, therapist and your doctor will assemble a packet of information that is submitted to your insurance company. The entire process, on average, takes approximately 3-4 months between evaluation and delivery.

Keep in touch with your therapist and the equipment supplier. Be available to assist them in advocating your case with the insurance company if needed. The more involved in the process you are the higher your chances of receiving your new equipment in a timely fashion.

If At First You Don't Succeed...

Your best offense is a great defense. Do your homework; work with capable, knowledgeable professionals and follow your insurance company guidelines. If, after you've done all the work and your claim is rejected or denied, APPEAL! Find out why your claim was denied, assess your chances of success and appeal your case.

By doing your homework, participating in the process and working with the individuals involved your child should soon be riding in their own set of wheels. Now comes the fun part. Keeping track of your mobile child!

