



Maintaining your wheelchair and cushion

Regular maintenance of your wheelchair is required to keep moving parts and upholstery clean and brakes and wheels properly adjusted. A build up of dirt or food on your wheelchair can have a significant effect on hygiene and on its working. The need for cleaning and replacement of components varies according to the size and weight of the user, the way in which the wheelchair is used and the physical environment in which it is used. Regular maintenance will extend the lifespan of the wheelchair and cushion, and maintain its reliability, optimal performance, and good appearance. It will help the wheelchair to remain comfortable for you, and help to ensure your safety. It will also help to keep you mobile. The following maintenance program is recommended to keep your wheelchair in good condition.

Daily

- Wipe away food scraps from the upholstery and wheelchair frame with a damp cloth then dry it thoroughly.
- Brush out or vacuum all corners of the chair where food scraps could be trapped.
- Cushions/Sheepskins – at night, lift removable cushions, shake and air them. Check that the cushion is intact and does not need readjustment or repair.
- Change and wash covers if wet or dirty (follow manufacturer's washing instructions).
- Charge the battery every night for at least 12 hours (powered wheelchairs).
- Check that all connections are secure and in place for switches, controllers, etc (powered wheelchairs).
- Check that the battery compartment is clean and remove dust and food, etc (powered wheelchairs).

Weekly

- Clean the upholstery and frame, using a damp cloth with water and mild detergent. Dry them thoroughly to prevent rusting of screws etc. Disinfectant may be used if needed, e.g. for food, urine.
- **Do not shower the wheelchair or use a hose to clean it.**
- Check for loose nuts and bolts. Tighten all screws on the wheelchair frame including ones on the upholstery, armrests and footplates.
- Remove and wipe axles with a clean rag that has a few drops of oil on it.
- Clean and check front castors for wobbling and excessive play, and for correct alignment. (Tightening the locking nut under the plastic cap of the front wheel often remedies/fixes front wheel wobble at speed.)
- Check that wheel lock/brakes are secured tightly to the frame and are easily activated.
- Inspect wheels to ensure that spokes from the axle to the rim are intact and that hand rims are not bent.
- Check that tyre pressure is maintained. Inflate only to the recommended tyre pressure (specified on tyre), or get assistance to do this correctly.
- After checking the tyre pressure, check the brakes and adjust as necessary.
- If removable footplates and/or quick release wheel hubs are fitted, remove them and clean out any dirt. Spray fittings with light lubricant (available in bicycle stores).

Monthly

- Remove hair, lint and other dirt from castors.
- Check tyres for wearing of the tread. If fabric/canvas shows through the rubber, then tyres must be replaced.
- Check alignment of all wheels.
- Check that headrest fitting/pelvic strap and other straps are in good order and securely attached to the chair.
- Nourish vinyl upholstery using a commercially available upholstery restorer to prevent deterioration.
- Clean Dartex material using a cloth and mild detergent. Wipe it dry.
- Clean chrome and painted surfaces using a cloth and mild detergent or an appropriate household spray cleaner if necessary.
- Check the position of footplates and adjust if necessary.
- Check upholstery for wear (sag, tear, splits).
- Check the frame for rust and cracks.
- Check the easy release and reattachment mechanism of removable legrests, footplates, armrests and backrests.
- Check that quick-release axles on wheels remove easily.
- Touch-up the frame with paint. (Touch-up kits for powder coated surfaces are available from hardware and paint stores.) You may also find a matching colour in nail polish.

Twice a year

- Take the wheelchair to a qualified wheelchair mechanic for a routine check-up.

After-sales service and maintenance

- Consider the availability of a qualified technician and waiting times to service and repair a wheelchair.
- Check the availability of parts and service.
- If living in a country area, consider whether the wheelchair will have to be serviced in the city and whether a temporary replacement wheelchair can be obtained.
- Many bicycle shops are able to replace tyres and check wheel spokes.

Further advice

- Refer to the wheelchair **User Manual** for more information about wheelchair maintenance. Store the User Manual in a safe place for future reference.
- **Tools** are a worthwhile investment. 'Must haves' include an Allen key set, an adjustable wrench, flat and Phillips-head screwdrivers and a tyre repair kit. It is recommended that you purchase (and carry with you) a hand-pump to inflate tyres.

Reference: *Powered Mobility— Empowering Participation*, Cerebral Palsy Alliance, NSW/ACT, 2009

Contact ILC Tas for more information



Ring **1300 885 886** to speak to a health professional

Visit our website www.ilctas.asn.au or email us at ilc@ilctas.asn.au



Make an appointment to visit our centre at 275 Wellington Street, South Launceston



Ring us to find out when we will be visiting your area

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