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**WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**
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adding
value
to
lives

Focus on... Correct seating

What is correct wheelchair seating?

When an individual is unable to walk as a result of an illness, an injury or a congenital condition, a wheelchair may be the means to a productive and meaningful life.

A chair that allows the best seating and positioning gives the client a base of support and a sense of stability. It frees up the arms and/or hands and permits the person to perform daily tasks independently.

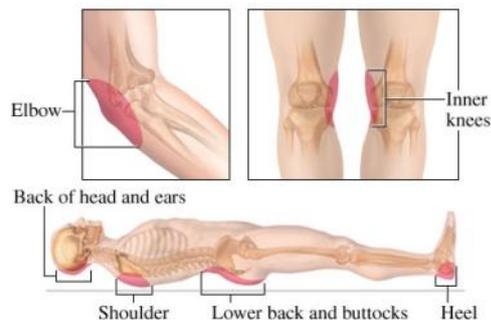
Why is correct wheelchair seating important?

When a wheelchair is provided without measurement and fitting by a trained professional, the person may lean or slide, may end up having to use hands or arms to keep upright, and may have difficulty with breathing or with digesting food. They may also develop very serious secondary injuries. Most of these injuries can be easily prevented but are very difficult to treat and in many cases can threaten the life of a wheelchair user. Therefore it is crucial that wheelchair providers are aware of these injuries and take measures to ensure that the wheelchair provided to each user is appropriate and safe.



What are these secondary complications?

Pressure sores— A pressure sore is a very serious deep wound that usually occurs in bony areas such as the hips, seat bones and ankles. It is one of the leading causes of death of people with spinal injuries in low income countries. It occurs when an area of skin does not receive any pressure relief, causing the tissue to die because of lack of blood flow to that area. They can take



up to a year to heal, and if left untreated the sore will become infected and cause death. A simple pressure relief cushion can save a wheelchair user's life.

Contractures— Contractures occur when a joint is kept in a bad position for a long period of time. The joint gets stiff and then the soft tissues tighten, making it impossible to straighten or bend the limb. Contractures usually occur at hips, knees and ankles and can be caused by a wheelchair which fits poorly or does not provide the user with adequate support of the trunk, legs and feet.

Scoliosis—Spinal curvature (or scoliosis) is very common in people with spinal cord injuries and post-polio. A lack of trunk and back muscles can gradually cause the spine to curve, leading to a permanent deformity and often chronic back pain. A wheelchair which lacks appropriate postural support or fits poorly (i.e. children being given a d u l t - s i z e d wheelchairs) can contribute to spinal curvature. A well fitting, appropriate wheelchair can help to prevent it.



Where can I contact a seating clinic?

The Seating Clinic at WCRC is held twice per month at the Centre, with off-site clinics held several times per month at schools, care centres, NGOs and rural hospitals and clinics. Services are provided by physio- and occupational therapists, with a doctor in attendance on an adhoc basis.