

Wheeled Mobility Options

As muscle strength or respiratory function declines, using wheeled mobility often becomes the safest and easiest way to move around. This guide provides information on various options available and addresses questions about insurance coverage and equipment available through the ALS Association loan closet.

Power wheelchairs

As weakness in the arms, legs, or trunk progresses, power wheelchairs can help a person move around independently while conserving energy and reducing the risk of falling. Power wheelchairs allow support for positioning and pressure relief that other options cannot provide. Insurance generally covers one piece of wheeled mobility equipment every five years, and power wheelchairs are the most expensive piece of equipment. For these reasons, it is usually best to save your insurance benefits for a power wheelchair instead of using them to cover a scooter or manual wheelchair.



Custom power wheelchairs are obtained through a wheelchair vendor. Your physical therapist can help connect you to a vendor in your area, or you can choose one on your own. The vendor will bring options for power wheelchairs to your home for you to trial based on the PT's recommendations. The physical therapist then combines information from your clinic visit and home trial to write a letter of medical necessity for your insurance. After insurance authorization is complete, your wheelchair is ordered and delivered by the vendor. The process to obtain a power wheelchair usually takes approximately 8 weeks for a person in North Carolina, and longer when working with out of state vendors. Most ALSA chapters have power wheelchairs in their loan closets, and these can be used to bridge the gap of time waiting for your custom wheelchair.

Transporting a power wheelchair requires an accessible van or a carrier attached to the hitch of a car, as well as a ramp to get it out of your home. As a result, other wheeled mobility options below may be easier for moving around in your community.

Power scooters

There are many options available for portable power scooters, which usually break down into multiple pieces to make transport easier. The heaviest piece weighs 25-35 pounds, depending on the model. Pride GoGo is a popular brand of power scooters. Folding power wheelchairs are another option and weigh around 40 pounds. Either of these can be ordered online, or you may be able to try them with equipment vendors. Power scooters can be difficult to use if you have weakness in your arms or trunk. Neither of these options is appropriate to use long-term instead a power wheelchair due to the lack of postural support and pressure relief.

Power scooter



Folding power wheelchair



Transport chairs

A transport chair is often the easiest way to access the community when walking longer distances becomes challenging. This is essentially lightweight manual wheelchair without the big wheels, which makes it easier lift in and out of cars. A second person is required to push the chair. Transport chairs are available through the ALSA loan closet. You can purchase a cushion to make the chair more comfortable or to increase the height and make transfers in and out of the chair easier.



Manual wheelchairs



Manual wheelchairs are not optimal for long-term use as they require significant arm strength and respiratory function to propel. Some people prefer these for use in the community because they are easier to maneuver over uneven surfaces than a transport chair. Manual wheelchairs are available through the ALSA loan closet. It is best to avoid using your insurance benefits for manual wheelchairs.