



Not everyone is able to wear a prosthesis after amputation and this can depend on a range of different factors. Some people simply make the choice not to use a prosthesis, while for others, wearing a prosthesis and/or getting a comfortable fit might prove difficult and for others it may just be too challenging.

In Australia the majority of amputations are the result of circulation problems. Poor circulation not only affects the legs but other parts of the body. You might be dealing with other health problems such as kidney disease, memory issues, loss of sensation in your hands and in the remaining foot. These problems may have affected your activity level for some time. If that is the case, it is common to become weak, lose fitness and possibly need more help with doing everyday things. For others, skin sensitivities or on-going stump pain can make it difficult to tolerate prosthetic socks and liners.

For older amputees, particularly if the amputation is above the knee, this can

make rehabilitation a lot more challenging. Building up strength, balance standing endurance and stamina to use an above knee prosthesis can be difficult. Simply, some people just find it easier and safer to use a wheelchair or crutches.



**TIP - When speaking to wheelchair suppliers make sure you ask to trial a chair before you buy!**

## What should you consider when choosing a wheelchair?

- What are your goals?
- Do you have shoulder or upper body problems?
- How will you be getting in/out of the wheelchair?
- Where do you live?
- What is the access like at home or your discharge destination?
- Will you use your wheelchair to get to the shops or to work?

- Can you go back to driving, if so, how will you get your chair in and out of the car?
- What is the best option for you – self propelling manual chair or a power chair/scooter?
- You should discuss your goals with your Occupational Therapist and think about any barriers you face.

## Wheelchair features - which features do I need?

Wheelchairs come with a range of different features. You should think about which features will help you to get the most out of your chair and what you need to live the lifestyle you choose.

- **Anti-tip bars:** These are rods at the lower back area of the chair which prevent the chair from falling over backwards and help to keep the chair upright.
- **Stump support (or stump rest):** If you are a below knee amputee you should have a stump rest fitted to your chair. The stump rest should be set at a comfortable height, similar to the same height of your cushion.
- **Arm rests:** Consider arm rests, whether you want to have them or not and if you do, ensure that the arm rest can either be removed or can swing away for the purpose of transferring.
- **Wheel positioning:** The wheels on your chair should be set-up to ensure safety and balance.
- **Wheels that easily pop off:** To enable the chair to be carried in a car.
- **A rigid or fold up chair:** This is important if you plan to take your chair with you shopping or on an outing and it needs to fit into the boot of a car.
- **Clothing guards:** Often when wearing bulky or loose clothing it can fall between the arm rests or the side of the cushion and get tangled in the wheels. You might like to consider adding removable clothing guards to the sides of your chair.



### TIP - Gloves.

Often a wheelchair with new tyres can be harsh on your hands, so consider purchasing a pair of gloves

which will also help to give you better traction/grip on the tyres or rims. Most wheelchair providers will allow you to trial a chair before making your final decision. It's important that your chair is fitted to the right width and height for you and is not too heavy for you to push around.

- **Chair height:** Will your chair fit under a table when you are going out to meet friends at a café or even at the dining table at home?
- **Foot-rest:** If you are a single side amputee then chances are that you will need a foot-rest for your sound side.
- **Size and width:** Consider width. Will your chair fit through doorways at home?

## Seating needs

If you are planning to use your chair for long periods of time, it's important that you have the right cushion to support you. Wheelchair cushions need to provide seating comfort, prevent pressure and give relief to sitting bones. There is a wide range of cushions to choose from so ask your provider to let you trial a few different kinds prior to making your final decision.



**TIP - Make sure you take your wheelchair for an annual service and maintenance check!**