

WHEELCHAIR SKILLS



PEER & FAMILY SUPPORT

scia

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia

Table of CONTENTS

- 03 Our Team
- 04 Manual Chair Pushing Technique
- 05 Wheelie Types
- 06 Navigating Slopes
- 09 Rain + Darkness



This booklet has helpful tips about using a manual wheelchair from the Peer & Family Support Team

THE AUTHORS



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In 2000, Jess sustained an incomplete C6-T3 walking quad injury after a motor vehicle accident.

Jess loves to travel internationally, having brunch and enjoys playing wheelchair basketball on the weekends with her friends.



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Pat was born with Spina Bifida, which presents as a L4-L5 incomplete paraplegic injury, and has been a full time manual wheelchair user for the last 18 years.

He has a passion for assistive technology (AT) and helping people with a disability. Prior to joining SCIA, he worked in the AT industry as a scripted product specialist.

Pushing TECHNIQUE

Visualising the chair wheel like a clock is best practise when pushing your chair. This helps get a good push technique in and understand your start and finish positions for your hands.



1 Hand Position: Start

An ideal start position on the wheel rim is 10 o'clock with a bend in your elbow. You have the option of pushing on the tyre, but that opens your hands to more mess that has been rolled through.



2 Hand Propulsion: Pushing

Gripping the push rim with your fingers wrapped around and your thumbs on the top, push through the rim to 2 o'clock. Remember to keep your shoulders down and elbows in, as best you can.



3 Hand Position: End

Once you're at the 2 o'clock position, release the wheel but continue swinging your arm down through the rotation. Count to two before you grip and repeat steps one and two.

Types of WHEELIES



Deep Back Wheel Hold

Best used for: Downhill Rolling

This helps in maintaining a slow speed whilst still rolling down a hill. Bring your knees as close as you can to your chest. Depending on the angle, the deeper the wheel hold, the more control you will have.



Shallow Back Wheel Hold

Best used for: Uneven Terrain such as grass or cobblestones

Shallow wheel holds are useful when navigating rough terrains as it keeps you lower to the ground, allowing for an easier balance and less rocking means less time readjusting.



Standard Back Wheel Hold

Best used for: Pressure Relieving

It allows your back and seating position to change the pressure points around your lower body. Doing this wheel hold and leaning against a wall is also a good way to stretch to your lower back.

Navigating SLOPES

Always assess a hill before you attempt it, to gauge your confidence and ability. The smartest decision tends to be the safest decision when it comes to slopes. Do not attempt inclines you don't feel confident about, and don't be afraid to ask for help where possible.

GOING UPHILL

- Lean as far forward as you're comfortable to prevent the chair tipping backwards.
- Depending on the incline, you may need to use short sharp pushes on your wheels, making sure that you prevent the wheel from rolling backwards.
- Wheeling diagonally, in a zigzag formation, will reduce the angle of the slope and make it easier to push.
- You can take regular breaks by turning your chair 90 degrees across the slope, and apply brakes.



GOING DOWNHILL

- You can control your speed downhill by slowly releasing your hand grip. Grip them tightly to come to a complete stop.
- If you can, leaning back and even going into a deep back wheel hold (ref. page 5), will make going down hill easier and safer. This will take practice.
- To come to a complete stop on an incline, in a more controlled way, apply tight pressure with one hand on the push rim until your chair turns 90 degrees and you are flat across the slope.

STOPPING

- Make sure you are sitting as upright as possible when you stop to prevent yourself from falling out of the front of your chair.
- Grab each push rim, and depending on how hard you grab them will dictate how quickly the chair will stop.
- Lean back as you stop to help with balance.
- Do not ever use your wheel locks to brake your chair while it is moving, they are not designed for this and doing this could cause serious damage to the brakes, your tyres, and yourself.

Rolling in the **DARK & RAIN**

Pushing in the rain or at night is a fact of life for active wheelchair users. It is vital that you know how to get yourself from A to B in times just like these.

Here are some helpful tips to get you through the slippery and dark conditions.

Rain

Rain will make things slippery. You may need to adjust how tightly you squeeze your push-rims in order to stop, and recognise that your stopping distance and capacity to stop your chair will be different in the rain. Puddles may disguise uneven terrain and the depth of puddles might not be immediately obvious.

Dark

At night visibility is reduced, and the dangers of unseen obstacles that could cause issues is increased. So taking things a bit slower is always advised. Where possible, use a torch. A head torch or one mounted to your chair are great, as well as your phone torch. Try to stick to established and well-lit paths.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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