



Disability Services

Information Sheet

Chairs: how to choose

Choosing a comfortable, supportive and functional chair requires careful consideration of a person's needs, preferences and the intended use of the chair.



Lounge and dining chairs

Lounge chairs are usually designed to allow a person to relax or complete seated activities such as reading, watching television or talking to someone. Dining chairs are generally designed to make eating, drinking and other tabletop activities easier.

Features to consider when buying a lounge or dining chair

Seat height

Seat height is important as an appropriate seat height should allow the person to sit down and stand up as easily as possible.

- ▶ A measuring guide called the “Stick-To-Stand” may be used to set the correct chair seat height for a person, or else a qualified health professional could make some recommendations for you. As a general guide, when seated your hips should be just above the height of your knees, with your feet flat on the floor.
- ▶ Some chairs have legs that are adjustable in height. This allows the chair to be altered to the most suitable height for each user.
- ▶ If the chair does not have legs adjustable for height, chair-raising blocks can be placed under the four legs to raise the chair to an appropriate height.
- ▶ A chair platform placed under all four legs can also raise the chair height. It is important that the chair does not rock or recline when a chair platform is used to ensure stability of the chair for the user. Also, make sure the platform does not prevent the person in the chair from getting their toes under their knees when rising. It will make it difficult for them to stand.

Firm Seat

The seat should be firm enough to make rising easier and to support good posture, yet still be comfortable.

Adequate Seat Depth

The seat should support the length of the buttocks and thighs. The front edge of the seat should curve downwards (often called a waterfall front), ending two or three finger widths behind the knees to avoid pressure on the calf muscles.

Adequate Seat Width

Seat width should allow enough space on either side of the body for the width of two to three fingers, but close enough for the armrests to remain comfortable.

Supportive Backrest

The backrest should support the natural curves of the spine. A lounge chair should also provide support for the head and neck.

Armrests

In a lounge chair, armrests should support under the forearm and hand, and be firm to assist pushing up to a standing position.

Armrest length and height for a dining chair should enable the chair to be pulled close to the table. The person's forearms should rest at about 90 degrees on the table.

Padded armrest may be more comfortable for some people.

Foot rests

The user's feet should be supported flat on the floor, or on a footrest when seated. Some footrests support the feet only, whilst others support the feet and lower legs.

Chairs that assist with lifting the user

Manual Lift Chairs

Manual lift chairs assist the user with standing. The user must still be able to initiate the movement into a standing position, but they are "boosted" up by the seat. Spring tension needs to be adjusted according to the individual user's weight and ability.

Portable Lifting Cushions

Portable lifting cushions that use a hydraulic system to assist a person to stand can be placed on to a variety of standard chairs. The person must still be able to initiate the movement into a standing position, but they are "boosted" up by the cushion.

Electric Lift and Recline Chairs

- ▶ A range of electric chairs is available which provide push button options for reclining the backing and raising the leg rest for comfort, or elevating the seat into a semi-standing position to assist with transfers. Some of these chairs can be reclined completely flat, creating a comfortable resting and sleeping position. It's advisable to use a leg rest when reclining the backrest to raise and support the legs and to avoid strain on the lower back.
- ▶ Single motor chairs cause the footrest to move outwards and upwards and the backrest to tilt back simultaneously. Chairs with two motors allow independent control of backrest, footrest and lift functions. Some chairs have a "wall saver" mechanism, where the entire seat glides forward as the backrest reclines to avoid striking the wall or furniture behind the chair.
- ▶ Standard chair padding is made of foam. This may be customised on chairs with zippered cushions in the backrest. Some chairs feature airbags or water bladders that assist with reducing pressure and increasing comfort. Armrests should be firm enough to assist the user when pushing up to a standing position.

- ▶ The majority of chairs plug into a standard household power outlet with control switches located on a hand-held control panel which can be mounted on either side of the chair. A battery operated chair is available which is recharged via a standard power point. This chair also features a push bar and larger wheels to assist an attendant with moving the chair.
- ▶ Many chairs feature a battery back up in the transformer. In the event of a power failure, the battery back up will provide sufficient power to lift the chair at least once. The battery should then be replaced.

Office Chairs

- ▶ If a number of people use the same chair, make sure the seat height, backrest height and position of the backrest in relation to the seat are easily adjustable.
- ▶ Adjustment can be manual or gas powered.
- ▶ Chair height should permit the user's forearms to be held comfortably at table height (with elbows at 90 degrees) and the lower back should be well supported. This may mean that a footrest is also required in order to support the feet and ankles.
- ▶ The back support should curve into the lower back and be slightly curved around the trunk. Some office chairs feature adjustable back contouring to better suit the user's posture.
- ▶ Some office chairs feature a "free floating" backrest, which will move with the user and provide more constant back support as they lean forward and back.
- ▶ A seat that tilts forward can help maintain the natural curves of the back.
- ▶ Seat bases that promote a forward tilt of the pelvis may also assist in relieving back pain.
- ▶ A five-point star base on castor wheels provides stability and mobility.

Load Capacity

The load capacity (also known as safe working load) varies widely between chairs and it is important for the user's safety that they only use chairs that will support their weight. A range of lounge, dining, lifting chairs and office chairs are available for the bariatric (obese or extremely large) person.

There is a wide range of chairs on display at the Independent Living Centre to view and trial.



Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre
11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Fax: 8266 5263

Email: ilcsa@dfc.sa.gov.au

Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus routes:

From the city T500/T501 or
207/208 to Stop 28 Sudholz Road

Timetable information: 8210 1000

