



Information Sheet

Wheelchairs or Scooters: selecting a scooter

Motorised scooters (also referred to as gophers) are often used by people who find it difficult to walk or propel a wheelchair over long distances. There are many brands and models available and it is important to understand the features and differences between various scooters before purchasing.



Scooter Selection

Scooter selection requires careful consideration of the following:

- ▶ The type and features of the scooter
- ▶ The user's physical skills and abilities (for example, balance, weight, strength, reflexes, ability to transfer, finger movement and control)
- ▶ The user's cognitive, behavioural, perceptual and visual skills (for example, is the user aware of their own and other's safety?)
- ▶ The environments in which the scooter will be used (for example, outdoors/indoors, steep areas, rough ground, distances, storage)
- ▶ Transport needs (for example, will the scooter need to be dismantled for transport, suitable for public transport requirements?)
- ▶ Is a scooter the most appropriate option (for example, would a powered wheelchair be more suitable)?

Assessment and consideration of these areas will help to determine the type of scooter required, whether a three or four-wheeled scooter is appropriate, and what options and accessories are needed.

To operate a scooter safely, the user must have adequate hearing, vision, concentration, memory, reaction time, ability to plan movements, judgement of speed and awareness of safety in crowded areas. If the user has difficulties or a medical condition that may affect safe scooter driving (for example, dementia, brain injury, vision impairment), it is advisable to consult a health professional to decide if a scooter is suitable.

Scooter Features

- ▶ **Size:** Due to their size, scooters are generally more suited to outdoor use, although there are some compact models available that are more appropriate for indoor use. Some of the smaller, lightweight models can be easily dismantled for transportation. Others are larger with features to cope with long distances and uneven terrain, such as suspension and larger batteries.

- ▶ **Three versus Four Wheels:** Four-wheeled scooters may feel more stable and comfortable over uneven terrain, and generally have a larger turning circle, making them more suitable for outdoor use. Three-wheeled scooters are more manoeuvrable in confined and/or indoor spaces due to their smaller turning circle, and may have more leg room.
- ▶ **Structure:** Includes the battery, motor housing, tiller and foot platform. Frames may be made from a combination of materials (such as steel, aluminium, fibreglass and/or plastic) and some may be dismantled for storage or transportation.
- ▶ **Suspension:** Is important for users who are sensitive to bumps/jolts or who are driving over uneven terrain. Not all scooters feature suspension.
- ▶ **Tyres:** Usually pneumatic (air filled), which may provide a cushioned ride. Others have micro-cellular or puncture-proof (solid) tyres, requiring less maintenance but a bumpier drive. Grey, non-marking tyres are suitable for indoor and outdoor use. Black tyres can mark floor surfaces and are more suitable for outdoor use, as are larger tyres that provide increased ground clearance and cope better with uneven terrain.
- ▶ **Tiller:** The central post or steering column. It is often angle adjustable to provide easier access to the controls and allow more room for larger users.
- ▶ **Controls:** A lever operated by either fingers or thumbs usually controls acceleration and reverse functions. One side of the lever operates acceleration and the other operates reverse. On some scooters a single lever combining acceleration and reverse enables one-handed operation. Lever extensions are available on some models. The control panel includes a speed dial or touch button which allows the scooter speed to be altered to suit the environment and/or the skills of the user. The panel may also include buttons or switches to operate a horn, indicator lights, headlight(s), hazard lights, and also contains a battery level indicator and ignition.
- ▶ **Ignition:** Usually consists of a key or a plug. A scooter cannot be driven once the key or plug is removed. A free-wheeling lever can disengage the motors if the scooter needs to be pushed.
- ▶ **Brakes:** Usually electromagnetic and activated automatically when the accelerator/reverse lever is released. Some scooters also have a manual lever hand brake.
- ▶ **Motors:** Differ in size and capacity, which affects the performance and speed of the scooter. According to current laws, compliant powered mobility devices are not permitted to travel faster than 10km per hour in public areas. Larger motors will be required for rough or hilly terrain.
- ▶ **Batteries:** Usually consist of two dry or wet cell batteries (most are dry cell), which can vary in size, power and range. Batteries are rated in amp hours, which, in combination with the efficiency of the motor, provide a guide as to the distance the scooter can travel before requiring recharging. Scooter batteries need to be charged regularly to keep them working efficiently. Long-range batteries may be available.
- ▶ **Battery chargers:** Are either on-board (in-built) or off-board as a separate item. In-built chargers are incorporated into the scooter with a power cord that is used to connect the scooter to a mains power point. Off-board (separate) chargers have a large charging box with cords to connect the charger to the scooter and

a mains power point. Off-board chargers keep the overall weight of the scooter down and may be less likely to fail, as they are not subject to the scooter vibrations, which on-board chargers are. They can also be substituted easily if required. Location of the charging point varies between scooters, some are low to the ground and others are located near the control panel.

- ▶ **Seats:** Are usually contoured and padded with vinyl or fabric upholstery. Some are height adjustable and may have a forward and backward adjustment to improve access to the tiller or to provide more legroom. Some seats swivel, locking every 45 degrees, to aid in transfers. Extra seating supports may be available for people with poor upper body control. Powered elevating seat may be available on select models.
- ▶ **Armrests:** Are often height adjustable and may flip up or down, or swing away to assist in transfers.
- ▶ **Backrests:** Are usually contoured and padded. Options may include a height adjustable headrest and a lever operated recline function that may also allow the backrests to be folded down onto the seat to make transportation easier.
- ▶ **Leg room/foot support:** Some scooters allow the user to put their feet beside the wheels or on top of the wheels. This may be a good option for users with longer legs or reduced ability to bend their knees.
- ▶ **Safety features:** May include anti-tip wheels, low battery warning light, automatic speed reduction in reverse or when turning, and a reverse beeper.

Accessories

Optional accessories may include front and rear bags and baskets, sheepskin seat covers, oxygen bottle carriers, light kits, seat/lap belts, walking frame, walking stick and crutch holders, sun canopies, anti-tip wheels, mirrors, dust covers, safety/visibility flags.

Additional Factors

There are many other factors to consider when purchasing a scooter, including:

- ▶ **Cost:** Scooter prices range greatly. Some services, organisations and community groups offer financial assistance, and there is a second-hand market for scooters. Other costs include ongoing maintenance and servicing costs.
- ▶ **Warranty/guarantee:** Consider the terms, lengths and conditions.
- ▶ **Parts:** Ask the scooter supplier if parts are readily available if required.
- ▶ **Load capacity:** Scooters differ in their load capacity (or safe working load). It is important to ensure that the scooter selected can take the user's weight.
- ▶ **Turning circle:** Scooters with a long and/or wide wheelbase have a very large turning circle. It is important to think about the turning space required.
- ▶ **Environment:** Choice of scooter can depend on where and how far the user wants to drive the scooter (for example, indoors, outdoors or both), and if the scooter can cope with the terrain.
- ▶ **Storage:** The scooter will need to be parked and stored in a sheltered area with access to a power point for charging.

Transporting a Scooter

If a scooter needs to be transported, consider the following:

- ▶ Disassembly—some scooters can be dismantled for transportation in vehicle. It is advisable to determine if the user can manage this and/or relevant others, as each component is heavy.
- ▶ What type of vehicle will be used? Is the boot big enough to take all, or the bulk of, the scooter?
- ▶ Is there a need to consider using other equipment? A range of devices such as lifters, carriers, trailers and ramps can be used to assist in transporting a scooter.
- ▶ If transporting a scooter in an accessible taxi, the user must be able to independently transfer off the scooter and into a seat in the taxi.

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

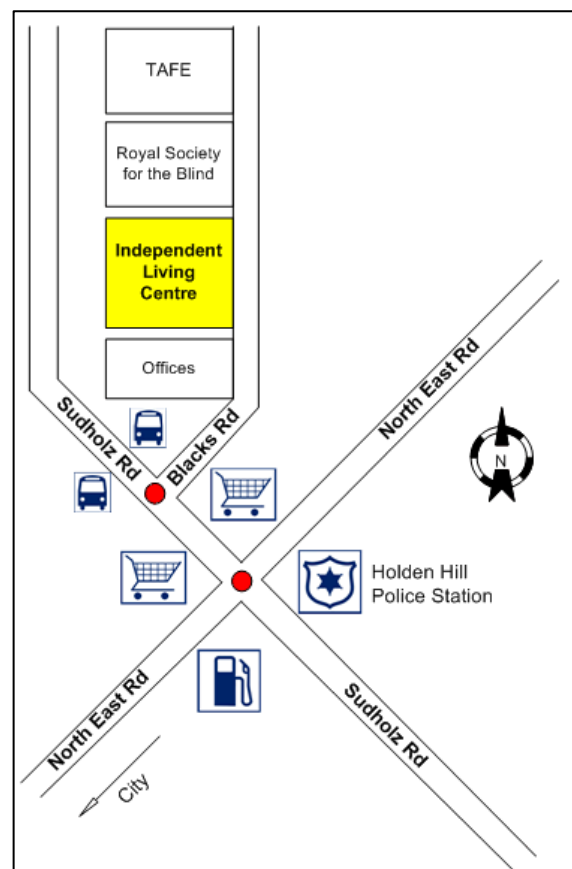
Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

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



Copies of this publication are available from the Disability Information Service

Tel: 1300 786 117 Email: disabilityinfo@dfc.sa.gov.au Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability Version: Aug 2011



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