

Motorised Mobility Devices Safe Skills Fact Sheet 1

Basic operation of your motorised mobility device

Operating your mobility scooter or powered wheelchair safely in the community is important. This fact sheet summarises the skills you have learned from your occupational therapist.

The fact sheet serves as a reminder of things to consider when you are:

- Getting on and off your device
- Operating the device in a forward direction
- Reversing
- Turning or changing direction
- Manoeuvring around objects and people

The second fact sheet in this series explains how to apply these skills and how to interact with road users when crossing roads (see 'Crossing roads in your motorised mobility device').

Additional information about using your device safely is found in the fact sheet – *Safe use of your motorised mobility device*. Information about applying these skills when using public transport is found in the fact sheet – *Using your motorised mobility device on public transport*. These additional fact sheets can be downloaded from the VicRoads website.



Getting on and off your device

Getting on and off your device can be challenging and will need practice. Tripping and falling are common risks.

- Your occupational therapist will advise you about the safest way to get on and off your device. Different techniques may suit different people.
- Be sure to wear suitable closed supportive footwear with non-slip soles (not thongs or scuffs).
- Position your device on a flat surface before getting on or off.
- Make sure the device is switched off and remove the key. This will ensure the motor cannot engage and the device will not move while you are getting on/off.
- Make sure you are comfortably seated with your thighs pushed back, body on the full seat width and the seat locked in position.

Operating the device in a straight line

Maintaining a straight course is essential for your safety and the safety of others. Weaving or drifting from a straight path may confuse other pedestrians. It may also result in the device moving across two different surfaces (e.g. pavement and grass) which increases the risk of tipping over.

Drifting from a straight path can occur when you look to the side and inadvertently turn the tiller in that direction. Practice and concentration are required to make sure this doesn't happen.

Important points:

Safe speed

- Operating your device at a safe speed is essential. The faster you travel, the greater the potential impact on you and others if you collide or tip over. Remember, you are in a heavy device that can cause a lot of damage.
- It is your responsibility to travel at a speed that is appropriate for the conditions, including at a similar pace to other pedestrians (usually about 5km/hour).

- An even slower pace is required around potential hazards such as wet or uneven surfaces, children, animals, driveways, carparks, turning corners and when there is poor visibility.
- It is also important to travel at a speed where you can stop quickly or turn without the risk of tipping over in case of an unexpected event.
- Under the Road Rules, your device cannot travel faster than 10km per hour.

Hazard awareness

- The environment around you is constantly changing and you will need to be aware of and respond to potential hazards.
- Be aware of hazards that may block the path or require a change in direction (for example, rubbish bins which have tipped over, uneven or sloping footpaths).
- Use the mirrors regularly and turn your head to check for people walking behind and around you. Mirrors provide a restricted view, so it is important to keep turning your head to look around and behind you.
- Slow down and check every driveway for cars reversing or entering. Move your head and trunk so that you can see around fences, gates or plants which may block your view. It is important that you can see any vehicles and the driver can see you, especially in shopping centre carparks.
- Keep a safe distance from other pedestrians. If you are unsure whether there is enough room for another person to pass, stop to allow them to move around you. Remember, you are in a heavy device that can cause a lot of damage to another person or yourself if you collide.
- Be aware of and slow down around children and pets, as they may behave unpredictably.
- Keep all wheels on the same surface (for example, do not have wheels on the footpath and grass at the same time as this may lead to instability).
- Do not operate the device too close to the edge of footpaths or near doorways in case someone steps out unexpectedly.

Operating the device in reverse

You may need to operate the device in reverse when:

- Parking the device or exiting from a parking position
- Manoeuvring within a shop or small room (e.g. doctor's waiting room)
- Positioning the device in the accessible spot on public transport.

Important points:

- Before reversing the device, make sure there is enough space to complete the manoeuvre. Look over both shoulders to check for space and hazards. If this is difficult, due to stiff or painful neck movement, turn your trunk so that you can see to the sides and behind you.
- Remember that a walking frame or a rear carry bag attached to the device will extend the overall length. More space may be needed to reverse into different positions.
- Always use a very slow speed when reversing.
- Use the mirrors regularly while you are reversing to keep track of available space and other people nearby. Mirrors provide a restricted view, so it is important to keep turning your head to look around and behind you.
- Where possible, it is better to explain to other people that you are reversing and where you need them to move to.
- When reversing make sure all wheels remain on the same surface to avoid tipping.

Turning or changing direction

Changing direction is a skill you will need to apply frequently, both indoors (when moving between rooms) and outdoors (when moving around local streets, shopping centres etc).

Important points:

- Always slow down before making a turn.
- Plan ahead to make sure the device is in the best position to make the turn and you have enough space to manoeuvre.
- Scan the surrounding environment for other people and potential hazards before making the turn. If it is difficult to see what is approaching or what obstacles or surfaces might be around the corner, slow right down so that you have time to respond appropriately.
- Use your horn or voice to advise people you are turning around a blind corner so they can hear that you are approaching.
- You should slow right down during wet weather, if turning on an uneven or sloping surface or in environments where you are likely to encounter children or people who are mobility restricted, hard of hearing or have poor vision.

Manoeuvring around objects and people

More complex manoeuvring is required in circumstances where space is limited, such as indoors, at outdoor cafés with street furniture, in shops and on public transport.

Important points:

- Always make these manoeuvres at a very slow speed.
- Make sure there is sufficient space to complete the manoeuvre before you start.
- Monitor the position of the rear wheels when the device turns in a confined space
- This ensures that wheels do not knock surfaces, such as supermarket shelves or walls, or injure people standing nearby.
- Ensure your loads (e.g. shopping bags) don't obscure your view of the device, wheels or objects in your surroundings

This resource has been produced by Road Safety Victoria in collaboration with Austin Hospital Occupational Therapy Department to support motorised mobility device user road safety and enhance clinical practice (2020). More motorised mobility device resources are available from the VicRoads website:

vicroads.vic.gov.au

Notes and Occupational Therapist contact details:

The provision of this guide to consumers/carers is not sufficient, nor does it constitute or replace, adequate motorised mobility device user assessment and training as would be provided by an AHPRA registered health professional.

AHPRA registered health professionals are authorised users of this resource. Intended recipients include any people who are undergoing motorised mobility device assessment and/or training.