



Wheelchair: Comfort & Support During Recovery

Medical disclaimer (please read): This guide is for general educational purposes only and is not medical advice. Your surgeon, physical therapist, or clinician can tell you what equipment is appropriate for your specific procedure, precautions, and recovery plan.

A wheelchair can be a helpful mobility option when walking is limited after surgery due to pain, weakness, dizziness, balance concerns, or weight-bearing restrictions. It can support safer movement and help conserve energy during the early recovery period.

When a wheelchair is commonly used

People often consider a wheelchair when their care team has advised limiting walking or weight-bearing, or when fatigue or balance makes walking unsafe—especially during the first phase of recovery after:

- Orthopedic surgery (hip, knee, ankle, or foot procedures)
- Spine or back surgery (e.g., laminectomy, discectomy, spinal fusion)
- Major abdominal or pelvic surgery
- Bariatric/weight-loss surgery
- Heart or lung surgery (particularly with weakness or fatigue)
- Shoulder or arm surgery (when crutches or a walker are difficult to use)
- Procedures requiring extended anesthesia recovery or extra balance support
- Any recovery plan where walking or weight-bearing is unsafe in the early stage

Potential benefits (for many users)

A wheelchair may help you:

- Move more safely when walking is difficult or not yet permitted
- Reduce fall risk during periods of dizziness, medication effects, or weakness
- Minimize strain on healing areas and joints
- Conserve energy and reduce overexertion
- Stay engaged in daily activities with appropriate support

How a wheelchair can support day-to-day movement

Depending on your needs and the type of chair, a wheelchair can:

- Provide a stable way to move between rooms without prolonged standing
- Make it easier to get to appointments or navigate longer distances
- Support caregiver-assisted mobility when needed
- Reduce early weight-bearing and limit unnecessary trips on foot
- Be paired with accessories (cushions, elevating leg rests, seat belt if included) for comfort and positioning

Safety note (important)

Safety disclaimer: Use only as directed by the manufacturer. Confirm proper fit, secure adjustments, and weight capacity before each use. If you feel unstable, lightheaded, or unsure about transfers, ask for assistance and check with a clinician about what is safe for your recovery plan.

Quick setup + safety checklist

- Fit & comfort: Choose the correct seat width and seat-to-floor height, and consider a pressure-reducing cushion if you'll sit for long periods.
- Verify weight capacity: Make sure the wheelchair is rated for the user's weight and intended use.
- Brakes: Test that both brakes lock firmly before every transfer.
- Footrests: Adjust for leg length and swing them out of the way for transfers to reduce trip risk.
- Clear the route: Remove throw rugs/clutter and improve lighting, especially for nighttime bathroom trips.
- Ramps/thresholds: Use caution on slopes and uneven surfaces; get help if you're not confident.
- Maintenance: Check tire pressure (if applicable), fasteners, and any wobble or looseness regularly.

 **Helpful Tip:** Set up the chair the same way every time before moving or transferring—lock the brakes, move footrests out of the way, and keep frequently used items (phone, meds, water) within easy reach. If possible, have someone nearby for the first few transfers until you feel steady.