



WHEELCHAIR CUSHION

INFORMATION SHEET

It is important to make sure you have the right cushion to go with your wheelchair. This information explains why you need a cushion, the different types, how they can help you, how to look after them, and how to get one or replace one.

This information is for general guidance only. You should discuss your needs with a healthcare professional. You can do this at your wheelchair assessment or contact your wheelchair service or supplier for more detailed advice.

Understanding your spinal cord injury and how it affects your mobility and ability to do things, including how this changes as you get older or are unwell, is also important when thinking about wheelchair cushions.

If you have any concerns about your skin such as marks, changes in colour or discomfort please seek professional clinical advice immediately!



CUSHIONS, YOUR SKIN AND PRESSURE CARE

Why do I need a cushion?

People with spinal cord injury using a wheelchair are more likely to have skin problems and risk of pressure ulcers (red marks or injuries to the skin due to poor blood flow) because of reduced mobility, sensation and circulation. Because of this, a wheelchair cushion is an essential part of your wheelchair. It provides the padding between you and the hard seat of your wheelchair, helping to protect your skin from the pressure build up that can happen when you sit for a long time. A cushion is also important for helping keep you in the right position in your wheelchair.

Skin and pressure care

A cushion helps your skin by using special materials (like foam, gel or air) that allow pressure from your seated body to be reduced and spread across the whole seat (distribution of pressure). There are different levels of pressure care protection, depending on the materials and design used. The levels of pressure care are graded in a range named as low, medium, high or very high.

The grade of cushion you need may be decided by how long you spend sitting in your wheelchair, your ability to move to relieve pressure (pressure relief) and if you have any history of skin problems. Also If you are unwell, have been unwell, or have noticed your needs have changed over time, may affect the grade of cushion chosen.

For more information visit the [SIA Knowledge hub](#):

- [Skin management](#)
- [Pressure ulcers factsheet](#)

WHAT IS PRESSURE RELIEF

Cushions cannot do all the pressure care themselves, complete pressure care involves you too. It is important you are able to move, or are assisted to move or reposition in your seat to help keep your blood flowing. This is called pressure relief. Every hour it is strongly encouraged that you move or shift your position. This can include leaning forward in your wheelchair, or if you have a powered wheelchair, using the tilt function can help redistribute the pressure.

As well as looking after your pressure care needs, a cushion should also support your skin health. When sitting for long periods, heat and moisture can build up. All cushions have fabric covers. Most are made from a breathable and moisture-wicking fabric (material that takes water away from the surface of the skin) and materials that regulate temperature (help cool you down if you are too hot, for example).

- Always ensure the cushion has a suitable cover
- Make sure you keep your skin clean and check your skin regularly.

For more information see the SIA Knowledge hub:

spinal.co.uk/get-support-body-matters-skin/

GRADES OF PRESSURE RELIEVING CUSHION

Grade	Material	Qualities	Good for
Low	Foam	Basic foam. No shaping. Flat square shape. Lightweight	Provides general comfort and mild pressure distribution. Suitable for people who can shift weight independently and don't sit for long periods
Medium	Foam, gel and air	Quality pressure relieving materials, memory foam, combination of foam and gel. Shaped design and options for parts to support your position. Stable surface for doing transfers. Lightweight	Improved pressure distribution. Improved shaping for position and comfort. Suitable for people with less sensation in the skin, some ability to move themselves to a different position in the wheelchair to reduce and relieve the pressure on the skin. For people that can transfer without help.
High	Gel/foam combo. Air flow and non flowing air	Top quality pressure relieving materials, often a mixture of gel, and foams. Also just air or a combination with air. More shaping and options to help your body position. If its an air-filled cushion this can be less stable for transfers.	Provides advanced pressure care and support for your body position. For people with no feeling in their skin, those less able to move in their wheelchair and who are sitting for most of the day. People who may need assistance to move in and out of their wheelchair. This type of cushion offers excellent support for pressure care.
Very high	Air	Due to the air flow this can be unstable	Provides specialised support and maximum pressure relief. Suitable for people with no feeling. Who need full assistance to move and reposition. Used for those with history of skin problems or higher risk of developing problems with their skin.

CUSHIONS AND SUPPORT FOR YOUR BODY

As well as good pressure care, the cushion should also provide support for your body position and your ability to move and do the things you want to do.

Think about;

- How is your skin, and if you have or had any pressure ulcers
- The way you sit in your chair and if this is balanced and the same on both sides of your body.
- The way you move when you sit in your wheelchair.
- How well the cushion fits you as you sit in your wheelchair.
- What activities you would like to do everyday, including how often you get in and out of your wheelchair.

Body position

- Cushions with contoured designs can help keep you in the right position and prevent movement when you are seated.
- Be careful with heavily contoured cushions as these can affect how you move sideways across the cushion for a transfer.
- Cushions are available that can have extra parts that can support particular positions that the body needs to stay in, such as supporting the position of the thighs.

Comfort and Stability

- A cushion should provide comfort as well as helping your balance during transfers and daily activities.
- Foam or gel cushions can often provide you with comfort and support.
- Air cushions can be a little less stable due to the way air moves in them.

Weight and how easy the cushion is to carry

- Foam and air cushions tend to be lighter than gel cushions.
- Lightweight cushions are easier to transport and lift in and out of your wheelchair - especially if you transfer frequently or move your wheelchair in and out of a car.

CUSHION EXAMPLES

- Foam
- Foam and gel
- Air: fluid / flowing air (large open cells of air) and air (sealed smaller cells of air) , plastic honeycomb.

Most cushions, or brands of cushion come in different varieties to suit a range of different skin and pressure care needs.

<p>Low - Medium</p>	<p>Foam</p> 	<p>Duel foam</p> 	
<p>Medium</p>	<p>Foam and gel with cover</p> 	<p>Foam with gel layer</p> 	<p>Foam with gel in seat</p> 
<p>High - Very high</p>	<p>Duel foam and gel inserts</p> 	<p>Duel foam and body positioning pieces</p> 	
	<p>Air honeycomb</p> 	<p>Air, individual air bags</p> 	<p>Air flow</p> 

HOW DO I GET A CUSHION

The usual route to getting a cushion will be through the wheelchair service. The type of cushion you need is often decided at the time of your wheelchair assessment with the healthcare professional at the wheelchair service.

- This can be for new, replacement or if you need review of your cushion due to a change in need.
- It is also possible to buy cushions privately. You can also use your Personal wheelchair budget if you want an additional cushion.
- You can also speak to a health care professional at your GP practice or wheelchair service.



HOW DO I MAINTAIN/REPAIR MY CUSHION?

- Regular review and maintenance of your wheelchair cushion should be done to maintain its integrity and your comfort.
- You should check your cushion each day to make sure they are set up correctly.
- Cushions should be cleaned, ideally weekly, to keep them safe and hygienic. This will also keep them well maintained.
- All cushions should be reviewed regularly for signs of wear and tear or damage.
- Cushions should be replaced promptly if worn or damaged to prevent skin damage and postural problems developing.

Contact your local wheelchair service for review or replacement of your wheelchair cushion:

[Walking aids, wheelchairs and mobility scooters \(NHS.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

HOW DO I MAINTAIN/REPAIR MY CUSHION?

	Daily check	How to clean?	When it needs to be replaced
Flowing air cushion (for example a Roho cushion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform a hand check by sliding your hand under the lowest part of your pelvis that you sit on (called the ischial tuberosity). You should feel ½ to 1 inch of space between your body and the cushion base. If it feels too firm or too soft, adjust the inflation level (If you are unsure how to do this contact your wheelchair therapist for advice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wipe down the cushion with mild soap and water. Avoid puncturing the air cells. Clean the cover weekly and allow it to fully dry before reusing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent air loss or difficulty maintaining inflation. Small holes, tears, or damaged valves affecting performance.
Non Flowing Air Cushion (for example a Vicair cushion)	Check for proper firmness and support	Some are 100% machine washable and easy to clean	Frequent air loss or difficulty keeping it filled with air. Small holes, tears, or damaged valves affecting performance.
Gel cushion (for example, Jay or Flo-tech)	Make sure the gel is evenly distributed. If it has shifted, knead or reposition it to avoid bottoming out in high-pressure areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check for leaks or gel displacement. If the gel has separated, redistribute it evenly. Wipe down the surface with a non-abrasive cleaner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gel hardens, shifts excessively, or leaks Cushion no longer properly distributes pressure.
Foam cushion	If the foam is losing shape or has areas of uneven wear and support, it may be time to replace the cushion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the cover and hand-wash or machine-wash according to the manufacturer's instructions. Wipe the foam core with a damp cloth (don't soak it, as foam absorbs moisture). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foam is squashed, lumpy, or no longer springs back after pressure is removed. Loss of firmness or uneven support.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Local wheelchair services: search through your council website or GP. As well as your local NHS trust service provider or ask in a search engine.
- [NHS.uk](#) (walking aids, wheelchair and mobility scooters)
- Product specific websites
- [Wear in wheelchair cushions](#) ([Sunrise Medical](#))



Check out our [Access All Areas travel and mobility videos and podcasts](#), and connect with people who can share their experience and advice via your local [SIA Community Support Group](#) and [SIA Support Network Group \(Facebook\)](#).

Visit the SIA Knowledge Hub

For more information, visit our [Travel Hub](#) or contact us at:

Spinal Injuries Association, SIA House, 2 Trueman Place, Oldbrook, Milton Keynes, MK6 2HH

e: travel@spinal.co.uk t: 0800 980 0501 (freephone support line: Monday - Friday 10.00am-4.00pm)