
MOTOR NEURONE DISEASE

FACT SHEET No 5A

Practical ideas and advice for people with lower limb weakness (1)

Some people with MND develop problems relating to mobility - the everyday problem of how to get out and about or move around the house. For some, the loss of balance, with the hazard of frequent falls, is the major problem. For others, weakness and wasting in the legs means that mobility is severely impaired and an alternative means of staying mobile becomes necessary.

MAINTAINING MOBILITY

1. On Your Feet

For those whose major problem is balance, but who have reasonable strength in their legs, a walking stick may well be all that is required. For those needing greater stability, the following may be helpful:

- Quadraped, a 4 point stick is more stable than a walking stick.
- elbow crutches with handgrips.
- walking frames, either standard or gutter type with forearm support.
- rollators (similar to walking frame, but with 2 wheels at front) for those with limited strength where lifting a frame would be difficult.
- trolleys - useful for carrying items around the house, as well as walking support.
- frame walkers have a seat and brakes

As mobility needs change, equipment can be borrowed or hired, rather than bought.

2. In A Wheelchair

Many people reach a point where the effort to continue walking, or the frequency of falls, becomes such that an alternative means of getting around needs to be considered. Using a

wheel chair for short periods may also enable someone to reserve their energy for more important or interesting tasks.

Wheel chairs come in a great number of sizes and types and a person's needs will vary, depending on the type and stage of the disease.

Manual chairs can be propelled by the person with plenty of arm strength, or the carer.

Electric wheel chairs offer independence and can be operated with minimal finger and hand movement. They can also be used as a manual chair with the carer pushing.

Some special features are useful for people with MND:

- extended headrests which can be easily fitted to most chairs
- extended foot rests
- mobile arm supports
- restraining straps for extra security and support, especially when using a van for transport
- trays clipped to the front for drinks, food, books etc
- sheepskin covers
- cushions are absolutely essential for comfort and the avoidance of pressure problems and there are a wide range available, such as covered foam cushions, gel ripple cushions, or Roho type
- detachable arm and foot rests (particularly useful for sideways transfer to bed or toilet).
- elevating leg rests (medical stockings may also be needed to assist circulation)

- Be wary of very light weight chairs as the foot plates and arms, on some, are fixed.

GENERAL ACCESS

You may need to consider access into and around your home.

Consult with your OT early about whether a ramp or a doorway widening may be necessary.

Steps are sometimes easier than ramps when not using a wheelchair.

STAIRS

Difficulty going up or down stairs is often a major problem. Most people will need help to cope with individual steps outside the home.

Options available:

- Stair rails (a second rail may help if balance is poor)
- Grab rails correctly placed will help with inner and outer steps.
- For those with stairs, a stair lift could be considered - the track is fixed to the staircase, and the width, length and shape of the staircase will determine the lift required. Some lifts transport a wheelchair and others require a person to transfer on to a seat.
- Vertical lifts are space occupying and expensive.
- Extensions and conversions, such as a ground floor extension with a bedroom, shower and toilet may be an option for some people.

Advice from the medical and allied health team is essential before doing expensive house conversions.

IN THE CAR

Many people with disabilities continue to drive regularly.

If you hold a driving license you must notify the Motor Registration Department as soon as you become aware that you have a disabling condition, which is likely to affect your ability to drive.

If in doubt consult your doctor. Also notify your Insurance Company.

HOW TO GET ADVICE AND INFORMATION

The Motor Neurone Disease Association can provide counselling and information about services and resources available and has a range of equipment available for loan.

Occupational Therapists can advise on alternate ways of doing things and on the range of equipment available

Physiotherapists are concerned with aiding and maintaining mobility.

Neurophysiotherapists specialise in treatment of conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease.

Domiciliary Care and Rehabilitation

Services assist people to remain independent and safe in their homes. They provide equipment on the basis of a professional assessment. (Refer Fact Sheet 2).

The Independent Living Centre

11 Blacks Road, Gillies Plains SA 5086
Tel: 8266 5260 (Free Call 1800 800 523)
has a wide range of equipment on display and can advise on what is suitable for a particular situation. (refer Fact Sheet 3).

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For more information, or support, contact

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