active disability ireland

Factsheet

Manual Wheelchair User



The information is provided for guidance only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more inclusive coach. No two people are the same, as such, please ensure your first step is to speak directly to the person understand their abilities and goals and never assume.

Manual Wheelchair Users

People use manual wheelchairs for a variety of reasons, which may be:

- **Congenital** (present from birth), for exampl**e Spina Bifida.**
- **Acquired** later in life, for example **Spinal Cord Injury, Stroke, or Cerebral Palsy.**

Some people use a manual wheelchair **full-time**, while others use one **part-time** or for specific activities, environments, or journeys.

Strapping

Straps may be used to help improve stability, balance, and confidence for wheelchair users during sport and physical activity.

- Foot Strap: Helps keep the feet securely on the footplate, particularly when turning.
- Knee Strap: Helps maintain leg position and supports alignment within the wheelchair.
- Lap Strap: Helps secure the hips, promoting stability and connection with the chair.
- Waist Strap: Provides additional trunk and core support.

Strapping systems can vary depending on individual needs. For beginners, simple Velcro straps can be an effective way to provide security, confidence, and support during participation.

For people with upper limb impairments, taping or strapping can help secure equipment such as rackets (e.g., in table tennis, tennis, or badminton). Gloves with tactile surfaces and textured push rims can also support more effective wheelchair propulsion.

Important: Take care when using straps in areas with reduced or no sensation, as prolonged pressure may cause skin damage. Check regularly for signs of discomfort or skin irritation.

How To Support Manual Wheelchair Users In Your Coaching Sessions

These coaching considerations may not apply to all wheelchair users but are common characteristics for an athlete with a physical disability. For greater clarity, it is recommended you ask the participant.

- If a participant is not using a sports wheelchair, check whether their chair has an **anti-tip device** fitted. If not, consider adapting activities (e.g., reducing speed or sharp turns) to minimise the risk of tipping backwards.
- Check the participant's **range of movement**, as some may find certain movements, such as reaching overhead, more difficult.
- Do not assume that all wheelchair users are unable to **bear weight through their legs**. Abilities vary from person to person.
- Some participants may **fatigue more quickly** and may benefit from rest breaks during the session.
- Some participants may have difficulty with **temperature regulation** and may require monitoring in hot or cold conditions.
- Encourage participants to **stay hydrated** throughout the session.
- Range of movement may be affected by factors such as spinal fusion or other medical interventions.
- Be aware of **hot or cold surfaces**, particularly where a participant may have reduced sensation.
- Participants with reduced sensation may be at greater risk of **cuts, bruises, or pressure-related injuries.**
- Some participants may require access to **toileting or personal care equipment.**
- Where possible, use a **physically accessible venue with accessible toilet** and changing facilities.
- Some participants may have reduced **breathing efficiency** due to muscle weakness.
- When transferring to a sports wheelchair or other equipment (e.g., a throwing frame or handcycle), participants may prefer to transfer **independently** or with support from a parent, guardian, personal assistant, or trained individual. Some participants may require a **hoist**, while others may need no assistance.

In some cases, no assistance may be required

For further information and support:
Please visit **www.iwa.ie**
or email **info@iwa.ie**