

# Manual Wheelchair User



This factsheet has been developed in consultation with key national agencies with experience and knowledge in the specific areas. 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 different reasons.

- **Congenital** (present from birth) e.g. Spina Bifida
- **Acquired** e.g. Spinal Cord Injury, Stroke, Cerebral Palsy etc.

Some people use a manual wheelchair full time, whereas others use it part time or for particular activities/journeys etc.

## Strapping

Straps may be used to help improve sitting balance for wheelchair users:

**Foot Strap** - to keep feet on footplate when turning

**Knee Strap** - to keep central in chair

**Lap Strap** - to secure hips to be at one with the chair

**Waist Strap** - to give core balance. Straps can be varied, but for beginners simple Velcro straps work quickly and effectively and provide security and confidence when playing sport. Similarly, taping/strapping for those with upper limb impairments enable rackets to be held securely (e.g. table tennis/tennis/badminton) and gloves with tactile surface and textured push rims enable those with upper limb impairments to push more effectively. Be careful with strapping in areas with no sensation as they may cause skin lesions - check regularly.

# How To Include 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 participants are not using a sports wheelchair, they may not have an anti-tip system fitted to their chair. If this is an option on their chair, ensure it is fitted. If no anti-tip is fitted, it may be appropriate to reduce the risk of the chair tipping back during an activity (e.g. by reducing speed and quick turns) as this may cause injuries
- Check participants' range of movement; they may, for example, find it difficult to raise their arms above their head
- There is a common assumption that if a participant is in a wheelchair, they cannot bear weight on their legs. Participants may be able to bear weight, depending on their disability
- Participants may or may not tire easily during a session due to their lack of motor skill efficiency
- Some participants may struggle with temperature regulation – both hot and cold, therefore, may require monitoring and in some cases, water to be sprayed on them to avoid overheating
- Make sure participants take in plenty of fluid during sessions
- There may be a decrease in a participant's range of movement due to, for example, a rod in the spine/ spinal fusion
- Be aware of hot and cold surfaces, as participants may have poor or no sensation
- There is the potential for damage such as cuts and bruises due to poor or no sensation
- Be aware that some participants may require equipment for toileting and personal care
- Be aware that it may be appropriate to source a physically accessible venue with accessible WC/ Bathroom Facilities for participants that are wheelchair users
- Participants may have a decreased breathing efficiency due to muscle weakness (tetraplegic/ quadriplegic)
- If transferring to a different wheelchair or sporting equipment (throwing frame/ handcycle), participants might prefer to do this independently or with the assistance of a parent/guardian/ personal assistant, or with a trained individual. With higher levels of dependency/assistance, a hoist may be required for transfer.

In some cases, no assistance may be required

## For further information and support:

Please visit [www.hadd.ie](http://www.hadd.ie)

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