

A CONSUMER GUIDE TO PURCHASING ASSISTIVE DEVICES

There is no denying the importance of promoting assistive technology to facilitate independent living for people with disabilities. However, it is important to remember that purchasing such equipment is not like buying a TV or HiFi. Assistive devices, wherever possible should be individually prescribed to ensure that they meet the needs of its user or users, the environment in which it will be used and the short and long term considerations for a particular disability which will vary from one person to another. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that many difficulties in achieving independence in daily living activities need not necessarily mean dependency on technology. Many people can, and have developed ways and means of doing things, utilising their abilities to the fullest.

It is therefore important to consult with your occupational therapist, or a knowledgeable and well-informed person, prior to purchasing from commercial outlets to ensure that all of the above considerations are taken into account and that you are getting professional, rather than commercial advice.

DISABLED PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION wishes you a pleasant and safe shopping experience. Safety and cost effective equipment must be the basic guidelines with due consideration also being given to after-purchase-service, availability of spare parts and appropriateness to consumer use and environment.

The following suggestions have been compiled to offer considerations, prior to purchasing equipment. It does not, however, preclude the importance of seeking individual consultation.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE PURCHASING EQUIPMENT

1. Who will be using the equipment - will it be independent or attendant-operated?
2. Where will the equipment be used - can your home environment accommodate the equipment without adaptation?
3. Check door widths, internal and external steps and access.
 1. Are any additional services required such as water or electricity?
 2. When will the equipment be used - is it required for a short or long term?
 3. What is your financial means - is it cost effective for you to rent, loan, or purchase?
4. Safety considerations - does the equipment comply with national or international standards and are there any contradictions to its use?
5. All detachable features must have secure locking mechanisms
Maintenance - what will be the maintenance costs and will a replacement be provided in the event of breakdown or defect?
6. Operational requirements - does the operator require training and can the equipment be demonstrated, will training and operational instructions be given?
7. What guarantee or warranty is offered - for what period and does it include parts and labour? Check the originality of the equipment - if in doubt ask to see the original shipping documents
8. Final Note Before You Go Shopping
- check the accessibility and the demonstration range of the shops that you intend to visit

WHEELCHAIRS

- Powered or manual - powered wheelchairs require battery charging consideration.
- Tyre type - solid or inflatable depend on environment used; there are indoor, outdoor, and dual considerations.
- Collapsibility - how compact and lightweight is the wheelchair for transportation.
- Always check the brakes and detachable locking mechanisms.
- Wheel size - large for independent operation, small for attendant operation.
- Detachable features - usually footrests and armrests the more features that are detachable, the greater the expense.
- Measurements - size and weight need consideration as some wheelchairs have a weight limit.
- Dimensions - wheelchairs need prescription to individual needs to prevent postural problems.

COMMUNE/SHOWER CHAIRS

- Mobile or static - if wheeled type check brake effectiveness.
- Commode functions - can it be wheeled over a toilet or used as a commode.
- Detachable features - can the armrests be removed for side transfer?
- Shower function - can the chair be used in the shower, i.e., is it constructed of non-corrosive material?
- Adjustable - can the height be altered to meet the transfer needs of the user.

HOISTS

- Mobile, usually hydraulic, space consideration is a major factor.
- Static - usually fixed over a bath.
- Electric - can be tacked on the ceiling, static or mobile - a major consideration is the cost and ceiling structure.
- Slings - the slings are equally important, if not more important than the hoist; they come in many different shapes, sizes, and for safety reasons correct prescription is important.

STAIRLIFTS

- The long term needs, need to be taken into consideration as the cost will be high.
- Platform or wheelchair carrying lifts - for those people who are not able to transfer.
- Stairs or chairlifts - for those people who are able to transfer.
- Check the safety standards of the company.
- Are your stairs suitable? Stairs with a flat landing or spiral require a curved track which can be very costly .
- Stairlifts can be down-facing or side-facing with swivel seat depending on the transfer abilities of the individual.
- Check the contraindications for certain type of stairlifts, ie, epilepsy, special harnesses are also an important consideration when looking at special seating for children.

PROJECT RICH at DPA

RESOURCE

Co-ordinating the use of available assistive devices and training material both local and abroad and to provide additional information and expertise where necessary. Provide a library and data bank of materials. Encourage and engage in the development of documentation and research on experiences in the usage of all types of assistive devices available in Singapore.

INFORMATION

Services for empowering disabled people through information and skills development at neighbourhood level. Provide information on existing updated assistive devices and other equipment, their manufacturers and suppliers and financial considerations. Make available publications, audio-visual and related materials as a library reference service and data base.

CENTRE

Assess training needs and develop coordinated training programmes in the field of study and information sharing. Establish liaison with hospitals, nongovernmental organisations of and for the disabled people, universities, polytechnics and trade unions, private industries, commercial establishments, Consumers' Association of Singapore and others. To facilitate support networks of and for disabled people.

HANDICAPPED

People who have recently become disabled due to accidents, disease or trauma, as well as those who are congenitally and adventitiously disabled.

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