

FACTSHEET



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Equipment needs in Spina Bifida

Every person living with Spina Bifida will have different equipment needs. The aim of the equipment is to increase independence. There is equipment available to help move around (mobility aids) and to make personal care easier (self-care aids).

The physiotherapist and occupational therapist prescribe this equipment based on individual need. Initial trials of equipment are done with borrowed equipment from the hospital. Once a final decision is made on what aids are needed the equipment is ordered specifically for the individual. The state government can assist with the costs of these items.

Equipment for mobility

Wheelchairs

The type of wheelchair that would be best suited to a person depends on how often they will need to use it. Manual wheelchairs are the most common. Folding wheelchairs are typically for people who predominantly walk, but become tired easily. They are well suited to walkers and are easy to sit in and stand out of.

Fixed frame manual wheelchairs are light weight and custom made. They are usually provided to people who need a wheelchair for their main mobility. These wheelchairs are intended to

increase independence and the person should use them themselves by pushing around with their arms. See the physical activity fact sheet for more information about pushing techniques.

Some wheelchairs can be adapted so as a person grows the chair will still fit. Children will normally be prescribed a wheelchair at about three to four years of age, so that they can develop safe wheelchair skills by the time they start school. These may be required for all or part of the day.

People who use a wheelchair as their main mobility aid need to check their skin twice a day. Sitting for a long time puts them at risk of a pressure injury. See the Skin Management and Pressure Relief technique fact sheets for more information about this.

Walking frames

Kaye Walker



Low rollator



These support part of the person's weight as they stand and walk. They also help with balance.

Crutches

Canadian crutches



These support part of the person's weight as they stand and walk. They also help with balance.

Orthotics

These are custom made splints, moulded from special plastic and metal to support the legs for walking. The orthoses should be reviewed by an orthotist at least once a year. They need to be cleaned regularly and inspected for any signs of wear and tear. If ill fitting, they could contribute to a pressure injury. The types of orthoses used in Spina Bifida are:

Ankle Foot Orthoses (AFO)



Knee Foot Orthoses (KFO)



Hip Knee Ankle Foot Orthoses (HKAFO)



Equipment for self-care

These items make having a bath or shower easier. They are intended to increase a person's independence in doing tasks for themselves. The occupational therapist will teach the skills needed to use them safely. The occupational therapist also prescribes these items of equipment.

Bath boards & Bath Benches

Bath boards are a removable seat that fits the width of a bath tub. It provides a seated area that ensures a safer transfer to have a bath.



A bath bench is a wide seat with adjustable legs. They also assist with a safer transfer into the bath. Bath benches can also be used in the shower recess.

Shower Chairs

For people who have problems bending or standing for long periods, shower chairs can provide that extra bit of stability. It is important to use a prescribed shower chair and not another plastic chair from around the house. Due to the hot water, regular chairs may slip or break and can

cause injury. Most shower chairs have weight limits of 100kgs.

Sliding boards

A slide board is used to help people with lower limb paralysis move from one surface to another. They are made from tough, thin, slightly flexible material. Ideally the surface someone is transferring too is the same height as where they are transferring from. Care needs to be taken when using a slide board to avoid falls and injuries. Special care is also needed to make sure the skin is not damaged.

Remember:

- Equipment may help with independence.
- You will be taught how to use the equipment safely.
- The occupational therapist and physiotherapist will help determine the best options for independence.

Further reading about equipment and Spina Bifida:

- Be active with Spina Bifida fact sheet
www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/be-active-with-spina-bifida-0
- Pressure Relief technique and Spina Bifida fact sheet
www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/pressure-relief-technique-weight-shifts-and-spina-bifida
- Skin management and Spina Bifida fact sheet
www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/protecting-your-skin-and-spina-bifida