

Hints and Tips on buying a suitable chair

If you do get a new chair it is important you try before you buy to ensure that it is comfortable for you and will fit in the space you have allocated for it. Please consider the following:

Height of chair

When sitting well back in the chair, with your upper leg lying flat on the seat, with your back fully supported and your feet planted flat on the floor, aim for your knees to be at right angles or 90° (see picture A). It is important that your chair is of the correct height. If a chair is too high or too low it may create pressure problems or make rising difficult or cause discomfort. You should feel no pressure on the back of your calves, thighs or knees.



PICTURE A

Depth of seat

Make sure that when you are sitting with your bottom positioned at the back of the chair that the seat supports the entire length of your upper leg and there is room for 2-3 fingers to fit in between the front of the seat and the back of your knees (see picture B). There should be a gap of not more than 2-3 fingers in order for your thighs to be properly supported. Equally there should not be less than a gap of 2-3 fingers otherwise it can cause pressure on the thighs.



PICTURE B

Width of seat

The seating area of the chair should be wide enough to fit one hand either side of you (about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch gap) and you should be able to comfortably place your arms on the armrests.

The back and head rest

The head rest should be as high as your head to provide it with full support (see picture C). If you get a chair that reclines, make sure that when fully reclined the head rest is as high as your head to provide you with full support. The back shape and angle should follow your spinal contour as closely as possible. Consider how upright a backrest you require to ensure the rest is fully supporting your back.



PICTURE C

The arm rests

Your arms should rest comfortably on the armrest and you should ensure that your shoulders are in a natural position and not hunched. The armrests should be long enough to aid standing when getting in and out of the chair. The front edge of the armrest should be level with the front of the seat edge.

The foot rest

Your heel must just hang over the end of the foot rest but make sure your ankles are supported. If you have any hip or knee pain make sure that the foot rest fully support the legs without any gaps.

Wings or no wings?

Wings on a chair provide a resting place for your head if you have a sleep, and they can protect you from drafts. You should also bear in mind however, that they could prevent you seeing someone and having a conversation with them, but this would depend where the other chairs are positioned in the room.

Filled in sides or not?

Whether you choose filled in sides on a chair or open sides is partly a matter of preference. However if you like to keep things like the TV hand control or your glasses, on the seat with you, then a chair with filled in side may be more suitable for you. If pets sit on your knee they may feel more secure in a chair with filled in sides.

Foams

There are many different types of foam and if you often sit for long periods or have any condition that might make you more susceptible to pressure damaging your skin, you should at the very least buy a chair with foam that is high density but medium firmness, which is optimized for preventing pressure issues.

Memory Foam - You could also consider buying a chair with Memory Foam which is heat sensitive, energy absorbing foam that moulds itself to a person's shape and size, making it more comfortable for the bony part of your body. These foams spread body weight more evenly across the surface area of the seat helping to reduce the occurrence of circulatory problems that may lead to pressure damage.

PROBAX™ Foam - This is new foam technology which promotes stable posture, good pressure distribution and comfort. Clinical tests have indicated this type of foam increase blood circulation in the vast majority of those tested.

There are also foams that are designed to be more pressure relieving for those who are at high risk of a pressure ulcer. Your District Nurse or chair manufacturer can give you advice on these foams and whether they can be incorporated into the chair.

Never add a pressure relieving cushion onto an existing foam cushion as this is likely to make the chair the wrong sitting height for you and the whole balance of how you sit on the chair could be altered.

Fabrics

There are many standard fabrics which you can choose between, such as tapestry, cord and linen. If you have specialist foam you might want to consider a stretch and/or breathable fabric, or a waterproof or water resistant fabric. Breathable fabrics reduce the build-up of moisture from your skin and are therefore better if you are at risk of pressure ulcers. The feel of the fabric will also make a difference to the comfort of the chair so this should be born in mind.

Issues associated with Riser/Recliner chairs

You need to think about how the chair works. Some chairs make the feet go up as they recline – others you can have your feet up when you are sitting upright. You need to decide which action is more comfortable for you and which best meets your need.

If your new chair has a hand control, always ensure that it is placed on your strongest or dominant side and that you are able to use it. If you have any kind of back problem you may be best to have the hand control for the chair on a stick or attached to the side of the chair so that you do not have to lean to pick it up. The chair manufacturers can set a chair up to suit your needs.

If your recliner needs a power supply then consider placing the chair close to a power socket. Ensure that you can plug in without any power leads going across walkways as they could be a tripping hazard. Consider using an extension lead and run the cable around the edge of the room.

If you get a recliner chair ensure that there is enough space behind it so when it reclines backwards it is clear of the wall. If you get a chair which raises your feet ensure there is enough space in front of it so it avoids any obstacles when it is fully extended. Also be sure that when your feet are extended on the chair, your feet and chair are not too close to a fire.

If you use a pressure relieving cushion remember to transfer it to your new chair.

If you get a riser chair you may need to consider the position the chair bearing in mind the back of the chair rises significantly which may affect fixed obstructions such as shelves or other objects like lamps etc.

Other considerations

- ✦ High chairs are generally firmer, higher and less deep than standard living room furniture.
- ✦ Make sure that the chair does not tip as you get in and out.

- ✦ You should be able to place your feet slightly under the edge of the chair to help you get out. You should be able to change position and do things like reading or eating without slumping.
- ✦ If you use an over chair table you will need to consider the clearance height under the chair to ensure the legs can slide under.