



Choosing a comfortable chair

Choosing a comfortable, supportive and functional chair requires careful consideration of your needs, preferences and the intended use of the chair. Here are some recommendations to support your needs.



Tips for standing

- Move your bottom to the front edge of the chair.
- Place your feet flat on the floor, heels back against the front of the chair and hip or shoulder-width apart.
- Bend forward at the hips and as you stand, look ahead with your 'nose over your toes'.

- Get up slowly, pushing up from the armrests of the seat keeping your bodyweight over your feet and using the big muscles in your legs to stand up.

Things to consider

- Try to sit in chairs with arm rests on both sides and avoid low chairs.
- Wear supportive footwear with slip-resistant soles.
- As blood pressure can fluctuate when you change your posture, avoid dizziness by waiting for a few minutes before standing up and moving away from the chair.

Features to consider

Seat height

When you are seated your hips should be level with, or just above, the height of your knees, and your feet should be flat on the floor. Correct seat height is important to allow you to sit down and stand up as easily as possible.



Seat firmness

The foam in the seat should be firm enough to make getting up easy and support good posture, yet still be comfortable. Some manufacturers will customise the foam type, size and density on chairs. Some chairs feature air bags, or water bladders, that assist with reducing pressure and increasing comfort.

Seat depth

The seat should support the length of the buttocks and thighs. The front edge of the seat should curve downwards ending two to three finger-widths behind the knees to avoid putting pressure on the muscles, nerves and blood vessels in the lower leg. If the seat depth is too long this may cause you to slip forward. This will affect your posture and your ability to get out of the chair safely.



Seat width

Seat width should allow enough space on either side of your body for the width of two to three fingers, but close enough for the armrests to remain comfortable.



Back rest

There is a wide variety of back rest styles. The back rest should support the natural curves of the spine. A back rest should also provide support for the head and neck. A small cushion or lumbar roll may help if extra support and comfort are required.

Armrests

Your forearms should rest on the armrests at about 90 degrees without hunching your shoulders and be firm to assist you to push up to a standing position. Make sure the length of the armrests and height of a dining chair enable the chair to be moved close to the table. Padded armrests may be more comfortable.



Fabric

The choice of fabrics available includes vinyl, leather, stretch material and wool. Moisture-resistant covering is available for some chairs.



Load Capacity

Load capacity is the maximum occupant-weight recommended by the manufacturer for a product. It varies between chairs. It is important for the occupant's safety that their weight is not greater than the load capacity. Lounge and dining chairs with higher load capacities are available. Load capacity may also be written as SWL or load test in kilograms.

Things to consider

Before buying a chair, you should test it for comfort by sitting in it for a **minimum of ten minutes**. Check whether the chair can be customised in size, and that it has design features which make it suitable for you.

Other considerations

- In which room will you use the chair? What is the purpose of the chair?
- Will you be sitting in the chair at a table? Can you get the chair close enough to the table? Can you push the chair into and away from the table on your own?
- Do you want to be able to sit with the back rest upright with the leg rest up?
- Do you have a small space? Consider a chair with the wall saver feature.
- Can you easily operate the controller? How close is the chair to a power outlet?
- Does an electric lift chair have battery backup in case of a power outage?
- Is there adequate space for your elbows if you are reading a book?

Static chairs



Dining chair

Dining chairs are generally designed for eating, drinking, and other tabletop activities. The seat base is normally level with padded seating, padded armrests, supportive back rests and have height-adjustment options if they are needed. These chairs may be called bridge or day chairs.

Although not height-adjustable, there is a chair that has a swivel-slide seat mechanism. It allows easy access to the chair and will enable you to move close to the table edge without moving the legs of the chair.



Recliner chairs

Lounge Chair



A lounge chair is usually designed to allow you to relax or do activities such as reading, watching television or talking to others. Some lounge chairs recline manually, and others have an electric lift and recline operation.

Manual recliners



A recliner lounge chair has a back rest that can be angled backwards, and a leg rest that moves up to alter your position. Typically, by pushing backwards against the back rest and pushing forwards on the arm rests will reset the seated position. To operate these chairs, you need to have good trunk, arm and leg strength. Some chairs have a lever or handle operating mechanism. This requires you to have balance for leaning to the side, and strength in your hands to pull the lever or to push your body forcefully against the back

Things to consider

Recline position differs between chairs, some lying back more than others. Some chairs have a 'wall saver' mechanism, where the entire seat glides forward as the back rest reclines, to prevent the back of the chair from striking the wall or furniture behind the chair.

Electric lift recliners

This type of chair can be reclined and the leg rest raised, or the seat can be tilted forward to help you stand up. Electric lift and recline chairs are operated using a hand-held controller with buttons or toggle switches. Electric lift chairs plug into standard household power outlets. Most chairs have battery backup in the transformer or in the hand control. In the event of a power failure, the battery backup will usually provide enough power to lift the chair once. Testing this feature allows you to know when the batteries should then be replaced.



Single motor

In a single motor recliner, the leg rest rises at the same time the back rest tilts backwards. Some chairs will have a delay when the leg rest moves before the back rest starts to recline.

Multiple motor

A chair with multiple motors allows independent control of back rest and leg rest movements. The extra buttons on the controller may be more confusing to operate than on the one motor controller. It is advisable to use the leg rest when reclining the back rest to raise and support the legs and to avoid strain on the lower back.



Adapting the height

Height-adjustable chairs

A chair with height-adjustable legs can alter the height of the seat to suit your size so that your feet are flat on the floor and your hips are level with, or a little higher than your knees. These chairs are available with a low back or a high back. You can adjust the back rest angle of some high back height-adjustable chairs. Some chairs have back rests which can be set at different positions to alter the seat depth. Separate height-adjustable leg rests are available for use with these chairs. However, consider your balance when having one of these in place and ensure it is not a trip hazard.



Chair blocks

Chair-raising blocks can be placed under the four legs to raise the chair. A chair raised on blocks should be safe for you to use. Landing heavily onto a raised chair is not safe, and nor is using bricks or blocks of wood to raise a chair as the chair can slip off.

Chair platform

A platform placed under all four legs can also raise the chair height. It is recommended that the chair does not rock or recline when chair blocks or a chair platform is used, to ensure stability of the chair. The platform should not prevent you from getting your toes under your knees when rising as this will make it difficult for you to stand.



Foot or leg rest

Your feet should be flat on the floor when you are seated. If you would like to put your feet up, consider adding a leg rest or ottoman that will support your feet and lower legs. A footrest or leg rest should be easy to move out of your way so that you are not leaning over it when trying to get off the chair.



Foam cushion

A foam wedge cushion or pad placed on top of a chair seat will increase the seat height however, the arm rests will not be raised in height and they may not be effective in providing support when trying to stand.



Hydraulic cushion

A hydraulic portable lifting cushion can assist you to stand and it can be placed onto a variety of standard chairs. It is highly recommended that you trial this device and have a full demonstration of its setup and use. Upon initiating the movement into a standing position, you are 'boosted' up by the cushion. As you rise, the arm rests become less effective in assisting with standing, as the cushion will likely be higher than the arm rests. Good balance and stability are needed as it can be unstable on a padded seat. The weight-setting of this type of cushion needs to be adjusted for you. These cushions are heavy to carry, can be difficult to set up correctly on chair seats, and you need to take care not to catch your fingers in the operating mechanism.

More information

For further information, or advice, about any item contained in this information sheet, please contact Independent Living Centre Tasmania Inc.(ILCT):

- Call 1300 452 827 to speak to a health professional.
- Visit our website www.ilct.com.au or email info@ilct.com.au.
- ILCT visits communities around Tasmania. Contact ILCT to find out when we will be in your area.

ILCT provides Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, and Allied Health Assistant services, on a fee-for-service basis. Our team delivers comprehensive assessments and support that may include assistive technology, home modifications, communication aids, and other tailored interventions to enhance independence and quality of life.

ILCT specifically provides supports to those aged over 18, who are Tasmanian residents and are of any culturally-diverse background. ILCT are a registered provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

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