

Helping Wheelchair Users Climb Stairs

When using a wheelchair, going up and down stairs can be challenging. While some people can go up one or two stairs alone, you might need help going up many stairs. In most cases, you will need two people to help you up and down stairs. Practice stairs with your PT or OT before trying it with anyone else. Always make sure people who are helping are able to provide the help you need.

Before Trying to Climb Stairs

Set up your wheelchair before climbing stairs. If you need help climbing stairs, the setup of your wheelchair can make a difference.

- Remove anti-tippers or swing them into an upright position.
- If you have a seat belt, put it on.
- If your chair does not have push handles, have your assistant use the rigidizing bar behind the backrest.
- Make sure the stairs and the top landing are clear. Your chair and an assistant need to fit at the top of the staircase. Also make sure the stairs are not slippery.



Anti-tippers in upright position

Safety Notice: Assistants should always lift with their legs, not with their back. It is best to start with a straight back. Lifting with the back can result in injury.

Contact your Physiotherapist for more information.

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Going Up with Two Assistants

1. Position yourself with your back wheels against the stairs. Place your hands on the rims of the wheels. When going up, pull hard backwards and hold the wheels firmly so that they do not roll back down.
2. Assistant 1 is the leader. They stand behind you holding the push handles. When ready to lift, they should keep their back straight. They will help pull you up by lifting with their legs and guiding you with their arms. They should step up one step at a time.
3. Assistant 2 crouches in front of you holding the stable portion of the chair's frame beside your knees. They should not hold on to removable leg rests. Keeping their back straight and lifting with their legs, they will push you up one step at a time. They should make sure that the chair stays tilted backwards.
4. Go up one step at a time. Before every step, the leader should count "1, 2, 3, LIFT". Start with your chair in a wheelie position (chair tilted back with the front wheels off the ground). Keep the chair tilted back until you reach the top.



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Going Down Stairs with Two Assistants

Going down stairs is safest when facing backwards. Always go down one step at a time. Going down facing backwards might feel strange at first but it is the better way to go down. Your assistants will have more control since they can use their whole body to slow the chair. When you go down facing forward, it is less safe for the assistants. Before starting, make sure both you and your assistant know how many steps there are.

Going Down Stairs Facing Backward

1. The assistant stands on the stairs facing the top. Their feet should be on two different steps.
2. Position your chair at the top of the staircase with your back to the steps.
3. The assistant holds the push handles or rigid bar. They should get ready by placing their top leg in a position to receive the weight of the chair.
4. When you are ready, lean far forward with one hand on the railing and one hand on the rim of the wheel.
5. Allow yourself to roll slowly backward one step at a time. After each step, hold the wheel and railing firmly to prevent your chair from rolling. Stop on each step so that your assistant has a chance to adjust their position.
6. Stay leaning forward until all 4 wheels are on the bottom landing and your anti-tippers are back in the safe position.



Check out www.wheelchairskillsprogram.ca for videos of various wheelchair skills. Click on the link for 'Pictures and Videos'.

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