



Mobility Scooters

A safety guide

February 2019

Mobility scooter - safety guide

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MOBILITY SCOOTERS

A safety guide

A motorised scooter can be your key to independence and freedom. If you are unable to walk, or have difficulty walking, a motorised scooter is a great way to get you where you want to go safely – particularly if you are travelling to the local shops or anywhere that it is too far to walk. But it is important to take certain precautions to stay safe and prevent crashes occurring.

If you are considering purchasing a mobility scooter or if you currently use a motorised scooter, this booklet is for you. It contains scooter purchasing and maintenance tips as well as information on your rights and responsibilities.

MAKE A SAFE CHOICE

Mobility scooters help people who have difficulty walking because of age or disability. Your needs and medical condition will influence your decision whether a mobility scooter is suitable for you, and which mobility scooter is suitable for you.

Many of the skills needed to drive are needed to operate a mobility scooter. To drive a mobility scooter you need:

- **Strength** You need a firm grip to hold the handlebars and steer around tight corners.
- **Balance** Good balance helps you to stay upright when riding over uneven ground or down a hill.
- **Coordination** You need to be able to quickly and correctly swap between using the accelerator and brake while steering at the same time.
- **Good eyesight** You must be able to see properly to avoid crashing into obstacles, people and vehicles.

- **Perception** The ability to know how fast you're going and judge the distances of objects, people or vehicles can help you avoid a crash.

Use of mobility scooters is not a recommended option for persons with a dementia diagnosis as the progression of dementia will make scooter use unsafe. Other transport options are required.

Visit your doctor or occupational therapist to discuss your suitability to use a mobility scooter.

YOUR ABILITY

When considering a mobility scooter, it is critical that you assess your ability to ride safely in the community and monitor your ability to ride safely, as time passes.

Who can I ask to assess my safety and driving abilities?

Ask your local doctor, he/she will assist you or refer you to an occupational therapist or physiotherapist.

Remember, your doctor, occupational therapist or physiotherapist is there to optimise your independence and safety in the community.

Self assessment checklist

The following are essential skills for your continued safe use of your motorised scooter or wheelchair.

If you answer 'No' to any of the questions on the next few pages you should contact your doctor or occupational therapist. They may be able to advise you if adaptations or modifications can be made to your mobility scooter or motorised wheelchair to compensate for any changes in your circumstances.

Coordination and strength

Yes No

		Can I easily operate the controls (eg turn key, adjust dials, and use the accelerator?)
		Can I steer and turn the scooter, even in tight corners?
		Can I turn my head to look to the side or behind if reversing?

Physical balance and endurance

Yes No

		Can I maintain balance when travelling across uneven or rough terrain?
		Can I adjust my body position when travelling up/down inclines such as ramps and driveways?
		Can I handle different weather conditions if travelling outdoors or long distances?
		Can I be seated for extended periods?

YOUR ABILITY CONT.

Vision

Yes No

		Can I notice and move around obstacles in all fields of vision?
		Can I notice moving objects and avoid collisions?
		Can I notice objects in the periphery of my vision (eg such as motor vehicles and pedestrians before they are right on top of me)?

Perception

Yes No

		Can I judge distances correctly? For example, how close an obstacle is?
		Can I judge the speed of my own scooter/wheelchair and other vehicles and pedestrians?

Thoughts and process memory

Yes No

		Can I remember safety procedures?
		Can I concentrate for lengthy periods?
		Can I react quickly if I need to stop and turn?

Medication

Yes No

		Am I regularly taking medication that may interfere with using my mobility scooter or motorised wheelchair safely?
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PURCHASING A MOBILITY SCOOTER

There are many different types of mobility scooters. Consider if you need a mobility scooter for indoor use (such as shopping centres or nursing homes), outdoor use or rough terrain, long distances or long days, or easy portability.

Smaller, more manoeuvrable scooters with short body lengths and smaller turning circles are good for indoor spaces like corridors and shopping centres.

Scooters for outdoor use are generally larger and heavier, and can handle hills and uneven surfaces, and provide more stability.

If you need to use your scooter over long distances and long hours in a day, you will need more battery power.

Before buying a scooter

- Think about your needs and uses
Research different makes and models
- Test drive a few different models
- Take a friend or family member shopping with you to mobility scooter retailers
- Be involved in the choice – letting a friend or relative buy you a scooter without involving you may lead to a bad or unsafe choice for your needs and abilities
- Take time to make your decision

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PURCHASING A SCOOTER CONT.

Factors to consider when shopping for scooter

» For what purpose will the vehicle be used?
On what terrain will the vehicle be used (hills or uneven surfaces)?

» What weight can the scooter carry?

» How big is the mobility scooter?

» How portable is the mobility scooter?

» Will ramps/s be needed to accommodate my scooter in or around the home?

» Will I be using my scooter to access the community and services eg for use in the immediate neighbourhood, shopping centres, or other?

» What distance will be travelled?

» How often will the scooter be used?

» What is the battery life?

» Where will the scooter be stored and charged? Who will ensure the scooter is recharged? Scooters should be able to be securely stored away.

» Who will maintain your scooter (eg check tyre pressure, clean the scooter)?

» Will a scooter retailer provide training upon purchase (for turning, managing hills, emergency stopping, turning, safe charging and storage, basic maintenance)?

» Who will service the scooter (eg replacement of batteries)?

» Is there after sales service, and what is the warranty on parts, repair and labour?

» What will you do if your scooter breaks down while in use? Roadside assistance differs across different states and territories. Check with roadside assistance providers.

Do I need to register my motorised scooter?

In NSW, a motorised scooter or motorised wheelchair:

- Does not need to be registered.
- Does not require a licence or third party insurance.

Should I insure my scooter?

It is not mandatory, but strongly advisable, that comprehensive insurance for public liability and damage to the scooter be organised.

Two components are recommended:

- Property cover, which is cover against theft or damage
- Liability cover, which is cover against damage done by you to others and their property.

Ask your insurance company if they provide these types of cover. Ensure the cover extends outside the home.

Note: Nominal Defendant Scheme provides CTP cover only in road related crashes in NSW/ACT.

NSW ROAD RULES

Mobility scooters, gophers and powered wheelchairs all come under the umbrella term motorised wheelchairs. A person using any of these machines is defined as a 'pedestrian' under the NSW Road Rules.

- » You are not required to register your mobility scooter in New South Wales.
- » You do not need a NSW driver licence to operate a mobility scooter.
- » You cannot travel faster than 10 kilometres per hour on level ground.

- » The mobility scooter must not exceed 110 kilograms unladen.
- » You must not travel on the road unless it is impracticable to travel on the footpath or on a shared path.
- » You must keep as far to the side of the road as possible and face oncoming traffic if not footpath is available.
- » You must not use the motorised wheelchair or mobility scooter with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 or more.

OBSERVING THE LAW

- When crossing the road always use crossings where available
- Always cross by the shortest and most direct route
- Do not remain on a pedestrian crossing for longer than is necessary for crossing;
- Do not stop on a footpath or road so as to inconvenience, obstruct, hinder or prevent the free passage of other pedestrians or vehicles
- If a footpath is in an unusable condition or there is no path to use, travel safely on the road.
- Do not travel two abreast either on a footpath or roadway
- Near roundabouts pedestrians must give way to vehicles
- Never move suddenly into the path of a vehicle as this may create a hazard
- You must regulate your speed when travelling with other pedestrians. It is most discourteous and dangerous to assume that others will just 'get out of the way'.

BEFORE HEADING OFF

You can make your journey safer and more enjoyable by:

- Making sure your scooter batteries are fully charged. Be aware of the time a fully charged battery will last
- Checking your tyre pressure as under inflated tyres can affect your stability
- Ensuring you haven't recently taken any medication or consumed alcohol that may affect your judgement
- Making sure the seat is at the right level and that the seat assembly is locked before moving
- Making sure you have rear vision mirrors, especially if you have limited movement in your neck
- Using a hat and sunscreen if it is sunny, or using a shade cover
- Ensuring that any rain cover you may be using doesn't affect your vision. Never allow the controls of your scooter to get wet
- Taking a mobile phone in case of an emergency.

BE SEEN AND SAFE!

When you use a motorised scooter, you are sitting lower than a pedestrian who is walking, which means you may not be seen as easily by drivers and pedestrians. You can make yourself more visible by:

- Wearing brightly coloured clothing. Consider a high visibility vest
- Attaching a fluorescent orange visibility flag to your scooter (at least at head height when standing)
- Using lights if you have them installed. If your scooter doesn't have lights, consider installing them. Front and rear lights should be clearly visible to other road users for at least 200 metres
- Fitting reflectors or special fluorescent tape to the front, back, sides and wheels of your scooter. Many of these are available from scooter retailers or bicycle shops
- Taking extra care in poor light. The risk of a crash increases greatly at dusk, in bad weather and at night.

SAFE TRAVELLING

You will find using your scooter more enjoyable if you avoid busy roads and always use quieter streets. As always, before crossing any road, stop at the kerb, look both ways and listen for traffic.

If you must use the road (for example where there are no footpaths, or where there are hazards on the footpaths such as uneven surfaces) keep as far to the side of the road as is possible. When travelling forward, face approaching traffic that is moving in the direction opposite to which you are travelling, unless it is impractical to do so. Return to the footpath as soon as possible.

- » Try and find the easiest and safest routes to use. If a particular route is difficult to negotiate, contact Ballina Shire Council and ask to make it safer.
- » Try to establish eye contact with oncoming drivers.
- » Watch out for cars going in or out of driveways.
- » Avoid hills if possible as they drain the battery and can strain brakes. If this isn't possible, slow down and use extreme caution.
- » Avoid travelling on rural roads where vehicles travel at high speeds and road edges which can be rough.
- » Avoid making sharp turns at full throttle.

- » Never travel up to the rear of a parked car in case it suddenly reverses.
- » Go straight up and down kerb ramps and not at an angle.
- » Cross at pedestrian facilities. They are there to make your crossing safer.
- » Travel away from shop-fronts to make it safer for pedestrians entering or leaving shops.
- » Ensure any parcels or bags you are carrying will not over-balance your scooter, and will not interfere with controls or vision.
- » The load capacity, performance and stability of your scooter may change depending on the type of ground the scooter is used on (check with suppliers and manufacturers).
- » Health and medications may affect your ability to use your scooter. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Tips for stopping

- Always turn the key to the off position or hit the off button when you are getting on or off your scooter
- Don't stop on an incline, even to rest;
- Be mindful when you stop or park. Never block a building's entrance, gateway or driveway.

CROSSING THE ROAD

- » Motorised scooters are most at risk of a crash when crossing the road.
 - » Remember you are classed as a pedestrian, so follow the same rules as for a walking pedestrian.
 - » Choose a safe place to cross – one which gives you a clear view of approaching traffic.
 - » Avoid crossing near curves, or on the crest of a hill, where you cannot be seen by oncoming vehicles.
 - » Use pedestrian crossing facilities where available (eg a crossing or pedestrian refuge).
 - » When approaching the road, reduce your speed. Once you start to cross, increase speed (the highest speed it is not always appropriate).
- » At roundabouts, cross as if you were walking and give way to vehicles. Do not travel around the roundabout on your scooter with other vehicles. You will need to carefully judge the distance and speed of oncoming vehicles.
 - » Give yourself plenty of time to cross the road. If you have difficulty judging the distance and speed of oncoming vehicles, choose an alternative and safer route.

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Don't assume cars will stop for you. Take particular care at intersections or crossings that are not controlled by traffic lights.

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SHARING THE PATH

Footpaths and shared paths are there to share. Be respectful of other path users. Because motorised scooters move so quietly and quickly, pedestrians are often caught unawares, especially those who have visual and hearing impairments.

Motorised scooters must:

- Not unreasonably obstruct the path of a pedestrian
- Obey all road rules, including signs for pedestrians
- Travel on the left side of the path;
- Travel at a speed which will allow you to stop quickly if you need to
- Adjust your speed to the conditions, especially in shopping precincts, around

schools and services. Travel at the same pace as, or slower than pedestrians. The average walking speed of a pedestrian is approximately 2-3km/hour

- Warn pedestrians when you are approaching (in advance), by using your horn (or beeper) in a courteous manner, by using your indicators or giving a hand signal
- Check what is going on around you, do not suddenly change directions
- If you stop to talk to someone, move off the path and turn off your controls
- Avoid using headphones – they may make good company but they restrict hearing which make contribute to a crash

PARKING YOUR SCOOTER

Whenever you need to park your scooter:

- Avoid stopping or parking your scooter in the way of other pedestrians or other vehicles
- Take your hand off the power control and remove the key if dismounting your scooter. Take the key with you if you leave your scooter unattended
- Park your scooter in a sheltered spot if possible.



MAINTENANCE AND TRANSPORT

Maintenance and servicing

- Ensure you charge your batteries according to the manufacturer's instructions so you don't run out of power when you are away from your home
- Recharge your batteries daily if well used. Charge your battery at least weekly if your scooter is not in regular use
- Keep battery housing clean
- Check your tyre pressure regularly at your local petrol station, every three months. Under-inflated tyres are more likely to get punctures and use more power. Check tyres for wear and tear
- Routinely maintain your scooter, at least every twelve months by a qualified service technician and more often if your scooter is used regularly
- Check you bell or horn is working
- Store your scooter securely, where it won't be stolen or exposed to hot or wet weather.

Travelling on public transport

If you are thinking of travelling on public transport with your mobility scooter or wheelchair, it is a good idea to plan ahead at least 24 hours and contact the relevant operator to enquire whether they can cater to your needs and accommodate your scooter.

