



## Wheelchair Brakes

*BQIS Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual's health and safety and to improving their quality of life.*

## Intended Outcomes

To provide safe wheelchair operation and information on wheelchair brakes that will promote safety.

## Definitions

**Brakes:** Also called “wheel locks.” They are designed to hold a wheel still, not to slow them down.

## Facts

- Wheelchair brakes are always necessary.
- Wheelchair brakes must be used and are especially important when outdoors, on inclines, in vehicles, on lift platforms, and during transfers into and out of the wheelchair.
- Wheelchair brakes should hold the chair without any slipping.
- Wheelchair occupant should be able to easily operate the brakes when physically able. There are special brakes that can be engaged and disengaged by persons with various abilities.
- Even properly adjusted and working wheelchair brakes cannot prevent a wheelchair from being tipped over, bounced or slid across a floor.
- Wheelchair brakes on chairs with pneumatic/air inflated tires can only be properly adjusted when tires are inflated to the proper pressure.
- Wheelchair brake assemblies must be tightly fastened to the wheelchair frame.
- Wheelchair brake mechanisms should operate smoothly with no loose bolts or rivets.
- Wheelchair brake handles (the part pushed or pulled to engage the brake) should not be bent or broken. They should have a plastic or rubber cover designed for ease of use, to provide protection from the metal handle, and to increase leverage. The cover should not be split or cracked.



### Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Do not use a wheelchair with brakes that will not hold the wheels from turning until repairs are made.
2. Wheelchair brakes that are not working should be reported immediately to your supervisor and repair sought from a qualified repair person.
3. Ensure that proper competency based training on wheelchair safety and operation is provided to all persons using wheelchairs and all staff who operate or work with persons using wheelchairs.
4. Make daily wheelchair safety inspections including a check of brakes.
5. Find a qualified resource close by for simple wheelchair repair and adjustments. This can be someone who has mechanical skill or aptitude, experience with basic hand tools, and can follow manufacturer instructions.
6. Find a qualified resource for skilled repair work on wheelchairs such as a wheelchair dealer who performs repairs for the same manufacturer as yours.
7. Know who to call for various types of wheelchair repairs ahead of time to reduce the overall time for correcting a problem.



### Learning Assessment

The following questions can be used to verify a person's competency regarding the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: Wheelchair brakes should be checked once a week.
2. True or False: Wheelchair brakes are not necessary unless you are on inclines or next to a cliff.
3. True or False: Wheelchair brakes should always be locked when making transfers in or out of the chair.
4. True or False: Your local auto mechanic is qualified to tighten a loose bolt on a wheelchair brake.
5. If it is discovered that a wheelchair occupant has lost the ability to operate their wheelchair brakes you should:
  - A. Loosen the wheel locks slightly.
  - B. Kindly explain that they can never use their wheelchair brakes again.
  - C. See that they are evaluated by qualified medical/therapist staff for a correction to their wheelchair seating system.
6. Who should you notify if a wheelchair brake does not work properly?
  - A. The physician at the person's next regular visit.
  - B. Your supervisor, immediately.
  - C. The team at the next quarterly meeting.



### References

Monro, A. & Mulley, G. (2004). Examine a Wheelchair. *Practical Neurology*, 4, 36-43

### Related Resources

Wheelchair Series Reminders: *Seating & Mobility Evaluation, Cleaning, Staff Training*

Resource Materials: *Manual Wheelchair Maintenance and Safety Checklist, Tilt-in Space Wheelchair Maintenance and Safety Checklist, Power Wheelchair Maintenance, and Safety Checklist*

These resources can be located at: [www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/4066.htm](http://www.in.gov/fssa/ddrs/4066.htm).

### Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. C
6. B