

Disability Campaign.org

Preventing Further Injury with Disabilities

If you have a disability, you carry a higher risk of sustaining an injury than the rest of the population. But did you know that the very devices that help you could also lead to further injury? Furthermore, certain medications that help you manage your illness can also increase your chance of sustaining an injury. Below is a guide on preventative measures you can take to avoid accidents and injuries if you already have an existing disability or chronic illness.

If using a wheelchair:

- **Prevent falls**
 - **Ensure that the wheelchair fits you and your needs.** If a wheelchair is too large or hasn't been adapted to match your needs, you can easily fall out or slip out of the wheelchair; furthermore, a poor fitting wheelchair can lead to the development of pressure sores.
 - **For manual wheelchairs, make sure that the breaks are on when transferring in or out of a wheelchair.** This will keep the wheelchair from moving and injuring you and/or the person(s) assisting with the transfer.
 - **Wear belts when in rough terrain or when going from one place to another.** If you know you are going to be on bumpy or hilly roads, wear your belts. You should also do this when going from one place to another, such as from home to work,

Image: Joni and Friends



or when using an elevator, as ramps and uneven ground can jolt the wheelchair and cause you to fall out.

- **Prevent pressure sores**

- **Use a good, proper fitting, wheelchair cushion.** There are many different kinds of wheelchair seat cushions and back cushions, but what may work for one person may not work for you. What's more, a cushion that has worked in the past may not work well for you now. Talk to your physical therapist and seating specialist about what cushion options are best for you. This is one of the easiest ways to prevent pressure sores.
- **Wear proper fitting clothing and undergarments.** Clothing that is too tight can lead to urinary tract infections and excessive sweating, and can also cause skin chaffing. If clothing is too loose, it will crease and form wrinkles that can apply pressure to your skin, resulting in pressure sores.

- **Prevent broken bones, bruises, and lacerations**

- **Train caregivers to be mindful of the various wheelchair parts when making a transfer.** If need be, ask your caregiver to remove or fold up foot pedals to prevent your feet from bumping into them. If the wheelchair arm is removable, remove it to ensure a smoother transfer.
- **Train a caregiver to properly fold or stow a wheelchair.** A wheelchair with a broken or missing part can malfunction and lead to injury.
- **Be aware of all moving parts.** Keep your fingers and clothing away from all moving parts, as failing to do so can cause bruises and lacerations.

If using crutches, a walker or cane:

- **Be aware of the terrain and what's on the ground.** Don't walk on terrain that is slippery or uneven, and keep cables and objects off the floor.



Image: Theodysseyonline.com

- **When using crutches, be mindful of any irritation around the skin of your underarms and hands, and tell your doctor of any tingling sensations in your hands or arms.** Tingling or numbness is a sign that a nerve is being compressed. Any numbness should be addressed to prevent damage to the nerve. Consider wearing gloves to protect your hands and soft clothing that covers the underarm to prevent chafing of the skin.

- **If using a walker or a cane, be aware of your grip strength.** If you are gripping too strongly, your hands will likely ache after the end of a day of using your cane or walker. On the contrary, if you are not gripping well enough, you may risk sustaining a fall. Check with your therapist and physician to identify ways that you can address your grip and posture while using these mobility devices.

Image: Runnersworld.com

If using a prosthesis: A well-fitted prosthesis can help prevent sores, but a poorly fitted prosthesis can wear on the skin and cause discomfort. Below are some recommendations on how to prevent sores.

- Work to maintain the same weight you were when you were fitted. Even a slight increase or decrease in body weight can affect how your prosthetic fits.



- Eat healthy and stay hydrated, as that will help you maintain a stable body weight and keep your skin from being dry.
- Wash the skin that comes in contact with the prosthesis and the socket of the prosthesis every day with antibacterial soap. Make sure to dry the skin thoroughly and if you are prone to sweating, try applying a fragrance-free antiperspirant spray.
- If you have diabetes, monitor and control your blood sugar as recommended by your doctor, as diabetes increases that already existing risk for developing sores.
- Try a different type of liner to ensure a better fit.
- Notice how you walk and carry yourself. Avoid activities that will force you to stand or walk in awkward positions that may lead to the prosthesis creating extra friction against your body.

If taking medications:

Image: Rappspharmacy.com



- **Read all labels carefully.** Some medications can make you groggy or blur your vision, in particular medications for pain management, as well as medications for mental disorders. Use caution when operating your wheelchair, scooter, crutches, or when eating and drinking hot foods while taking these medications until you know whether or not it affects your state of alertness or vision. Not doing so can put you at risk for falls, burns, and other accidents.
- **Know possible side effects and complications.** If your doctor has prescribed a medication, it is because both you and your physician have weighed the medication's benefits against its side effects and determined that you are an eligible candidate for the medication; however, that does not mean that side effects or complications cannot happen. If you develop a rash or allergic reaction, experience strange or new symptoms, or are experiencing thoughts of suicide, contact your physician right away. Ignoring such signs could lead to serious complications, including accidental death.

Bibliography

How to Prevent Sores with your Prosthetic. (n.d.). Retrieved June 12, 2016, from <http://www.ctechops.net/blog/prevent-sores-prosthetic>

Physical Therapists Can Properly Assess & Fit Walking Aids to Prevent Injuries. (2010, December 29). Retrieved June 12, 2016, from <http://www.apta.org/Media/Releases/Consumer/2009/7/9/>

Joni and Friends can assume no liability in the recommendation of any product, service or organization, nor does this constitute an endorsement.

© Joni and Friends, 2016
Used by permission of **Joni and Friends**
P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376
www.joniandfriends.org