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Help cut mobility scooter accidents



At least 62 Australians—mostly in their 60s to 90s—have died from mobility scooter collisions or falls.



Hundreds of older people go to hospital each year suffering serious head wounds and injuries to their hips and limbs after losing control of their mobility scooter or falling from the scooter. Many of these accidents happen on roads.

Mobility scooters, gophers or buggies are a great way to get to the shops or around your community if you have physical problems that make it hard for you to walk distances. If you use or are thinking of using a mobility scooter, follow these simple tips to make sure you don't become another injury victim.

Cover photograph by John Jennings



Driving a mobility scooter requires very good sight, strength, coordination, balance and concentration.

Safety tips

Ensure a mobility scooter is a safe choice for you

Driving a mobility scooter requires a combination of sight, strength, coordination, balance and concentration. Before buying a mobility scooter, and at regular intervals once you have purchased a mobility scooter, ask your doctor or occupational therapist to check that you can:

- > steer and control the mobility scooter
- > see pedestrians and vehicles
- > judge distances
- > recognise hazards and obstacles in your path
- > keep and shift your balance when travelling over rough terrain or up and down slopes
- > sit for long periods
- > concentrate for long periods and still be able to react quickly to sudden changes such as rough ground or crowds
- > be patient enough to slow down, stop and wait whenever necessary
- > get in and out of the mobility scooter without falling
- > easily get the mobility scooter in and out of its storage place.

If you regularly take medication that makes you drowsy, or if you lack any of the above abilities, a mobility scooter is not a safe option for you. However, your doctor or occupational therapist will be able to suggest other methods or services to help you get around.

Choose the right mobility scooter for you

Three or four-wheeled?

Have an assessment done by an occupational therapist to check whether a mobility scooter is right for you and to get advice on the most appropriate type of scooter for your needs.

Three-wheeled scooters are ideal for using indoors because they are light and have a small turning circle. This makes these scooters easier to turn and drive around obstacles. While some sturdier three-wheeled models may be suitable for outdoor use, any scooter can be unsafe when driven carelessly over rough terrain.

Most four-wheeled scooters are suitable for travelling outdoors but have a larger turning circle than three-wheeled scooters. As a result, drivers of four-wheeled scooters need to steer carefully to avoid obstacles. The impact of running into people, or objects can cause you to overbalance, fall or lose control of the scooter. That is why it is wise to avoid using four-wheeled scooters in places where there are crowds or many obstacles.

Legal requirements

The weight requirement for a mobility scooter varies from 110 kg to 150 kg across Australian states and territories. Check the relevant weight requirement for your state or territory with your road traffic authority.

In all states and territories except Queensland, you do not need to register a mobility scooter. A mobility scooter that is not capable of travelling more than 10 km/h is classed as a pedestrian and should be used on footpaths.

Be careful if you purchase a higher speed device as under the law these may be classed as motor vehicles. Check with your road traffic authority as to whether they are allowed to be legally used and whether there are weight limits or registration requirements.

Have a test run and get some training

Before you buy a mobility scooter, have a test run to ensure you have the strength, control and confidence to use it. It is not advisable to purchase the product over the internet or by other means without first having the opportunity to take it for a test run. Many suppliers and some local councils provide training so you can feel confident using the scooter in different situations.

You should purchase your mobility scooters from an ethical, authorised supplier who provides pre-sales advice, basic training and after-sales service and support.



Before you buy a mobility scooter, have a test run to ensure you have the strength, control and confidence to use it.

You should also check with your supplier to ensure the mobility scooter you intend to purchase has been properly listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods.

Be seen

Make sure other pedestrians and motorists can see you.

- > Attach a reflective safety flag to your scooter that's high enough for motorists and cyclists to see. You can get these from a bike shop.
- > Wear brightly coloured clothes.
- > Display a white light at the front, a red light at the back and reflectors for times when there is less daylight.

Don't drink and drive

If you have been drinking alcohol, it is safer to travel by taxi or get a lift from a friend. Research shows serious injuries and death have resulted from situations where mobility scooter drivers were under the influence of alcohol.



Plan your trips using routes where you know there are footpaths.

Wear a safety helmet

Head injuries are a common result of mobility scooter accidents—it is recommended that you always wear a helmet for protection to reduce the risk of a head injury.

Travel at the right speed

Mobility scooters must not travel at more than 10 km/h.

Be very cautious when travelling in a crowded area or over rough terrain—always travel at the lowest speed possible to avoid accidents.

Where possible, stick to the footpaths

Under the law, people using mobility scooters are pedestrians and are expected, as far as possible, to stick to the footpaths.

- > Plan your trips using routes where you know there are footpaths.
- > If there are no footpaths in your area, a mobility scooter might not be the safest option for you.

Only ride on roads as a last resort

Only use roads as a last resort when there are no footpaths.

- > Use quiet streets, not busy main roads.
- > Stick as close as possible to the kerb. Try to face the oncoming traffic, if possible.
- > Ensure you can be seen.
- > Watch out for parked and parking cars and for drivers opening doors.
- > Be patient. Slow down, stop and give way to faster, heavier vehicles—you cannot race a car or truck when you're driving a mobility scooter.

Only cross roads at pedestrian crossings

Wait for the green light before you cross. If you are at a crossing with flashing lights or a zebra crossing, wait for motorists to stop before you go out on the crossing—you never know when someone hasn't seen you. Even if a motorist or cyclist is in the wrong by not stopping, waiting for them to pass is better than ending up in hospital.

Watch out for vehicles leaving and entering driveways

Never assume the driver has seen you. Better to slow down, stop and let them pass than to try to get across before they do.

Adjust your driving to the conditions

Slow down and if necessary stop when you are:

- > near other pedestrians or cyclists
- > travelling up or down ramps or slopes
- > on rough terrain
- > near driveways or in car parks.

To avoid tipping over when travelling up and down ramps or slopes:

- > always drive in as straight a line as possible
- > don't stop or drive on slopes that are too steep for your scooter.



Keep the load down

To avoid tipping over:

- > don't carry too many parcels
- > don't take passengers—your scooter is only designed to carry one person.

Make sure you can see

- > Don't load your scooter with parcels that block your view.
- > If you need glasses to see distances, always wear them when driving.

Contact

For more information about mandatory standards, bans, recalls and emerging issues—and to subscribe to email alerts and RSS—visit our websites:

www.productsafety.gov.au

www.recalls.gov.au

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Voice-only (speak and listen) users phone: 1300 555 727 and ask for 1300 302 502

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