

**KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**

**SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**SERVICE USERS ADVICE NOTE No 8**

**CHOOSING A SUITABLE CHAIR**

The aim of carefully selecting a chair is to allow the user to sit in comfort, and to get in and out of with ease so helping the user to remain mobile. As it is likely to be used for many hours good sitting posture should be combined with the freedom to shift position.

The following features of a chair need consideration:

**Seat Height**

* The angle at hips and knees should be no less than 90degrees (fig 1).
* If the seat is too high pressure may result on the back of the thighs, as the feet are unable to reach the floor to give support.
* When a seat height is comfortable, but is too low to get up without assistance, a compromise may be to raise the chair and use a footstool, but only if this can be positioned and removed safely.
* To measure for correct height: The user should sit on an upright chair with their feet should be flat on floor (wearing the shoes that are normally worn for indoor use). The leg length should then be measured from the floor to the crease at the back of the knee.
* This gives a height measurement which should be matched by the height of the chair seat.

 Figure 1

NB Make allowances for compression of soft cushions or mattresses. The seat height when compressed should equal the leg length measurement.

**Seat Depth**

* The ideal measurement of the seat depth should be from the back of the hips along the thigh to approximately 2.5cm behind the back of the knee.
* If the seat is too deep the material may cause friction when in contact with the calves and the person will slump in the chair (fig.2)

Figure 2

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**Seat slope**

* This may be different when the chair is occupied from when it is empty.
* The slope should be sufficient to prevent the user sliding forward but not so steep that they have difficulty rising from the chair.
* Hammocked suspension of the seat often increases difficulty in rising, and a firm seat base is recommended.

**Seat Width**

* The width of the seat should be the distance between the hips plus the width of a clenched fist on either side.

**Backrest Height**

* The backrest should be high enough to support the head in order to lean back comfortably.

**Back Rest Slope**



* A gentle slope backwards from the seat to shoulder height is comfortable.
* If the slope is too great leaning forward to get up from the chair will be more difficult and the user will use excessive neck flexion to look straight ahead or downwards (fig.3)
* If the backrest is too upright it may restrict neck movements.
* The backrest should provide support in the lumbar region i.e. small of the back and just below.
* People who are long in the trunk tend to need a higher and longer lumbar support.
* If the support is too low it just pushes the user forward.

Figure 3

Figure 3

**Neck Support**

* A separate adjustable headrest can be positioned at the correct height.
* It should support the base of the skull and not the back of the head.

**Wings on the Chair**

* Wings are popular as head rests with people who sleep in chairs. However it does mean leaning the head so far sideways that it results in a poor sleeping posture.
* Wings also restrict vision.



* Armrests provide support when sitting and leverage when moving from sit to stand.
* They should extend beyond the front of seat edge, and the users shoulders should not be hunched or dropped (fig.4)
* Armrests should be used to help the user shift their body weight to change position in the chair and minimise the danger of pressure.
* Sloping upward and padded armrests increases comfort.

Figure 4.

**Filled in Sides**

* Contraindications are that anything spilled will get trapped and belongings may end up beneath the seating area creating high pressure points.
* However, filled in armrests which leave a gap between sides and cushion reduce draughts and make cleaning the chair easier.

**Clearance under seat and leg design**

* To get out of a chair easily it must be possible to position the feet almost under the front of the chair, so bringing them below the body’s centre of gravity.
* A low front rail makes this impossible.
* Splayed chair legs offer greater stability but may take up more space, and if they project too far they could cause a fall.

**Upholstery**

* A firm base should support the seat padding so that it will not ‘bottom’.
* Materials should comply with Fire and Furniture Regulations 1988.
* The choice of covering depends on where the chair is to be used and the degree of wear and tear expected.

This Kent Social Care, Health and Wellbeing advice note is only a brief guide.

Additional information is available from:

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