

## Seating and Positioning FAQs

**Question 1: What are some key factors to consider when assessing seating and positioning issues with an older adult?**

### **Physical, Mental, and Functional Considerations**

- Does the client have fixed deformities that influence his or her seating posture (e.g., posterior pelvic tilt, pelvic rotation, fixed kyphosis, fixed scoliosis, joint contractures, leg length discrepancy, head and neck in fixed position, etc.)?
- Does the client have medical issues that are influencing his or her posture (e.g., comatose, medicated, in pain, fatigue, incontinence issues, acute urinary track infection, impaired skin integrity, decubitus ulcers, late stage of dementia with minimal responsiveness, severe shortness of breath from chronic congestive heart failure)?
- Is the poor posture a result of musculoskeletal or sensory issues (e.g., muscle weakness, low and high tone, spasticity, sensory impairment, joint limitations, rigidity)?
- Is the poor posture a result of declined cognitive status (e.g., dementia, Alzheimer's disease, psychosis, or other behavioral issues)?
- Is the poor posture due to a client's decreased functional participation (e.g., needs help with feeding, completing activities of daily living (ADL), decreased social interaction, or leisure activity participation)?

### **Environmental Considerations**

- What is the client's residential setting (e.g., home, skilled nursing facility, assisted living facility, etc.)?
- Is the client's residential setting adaptable to use a recommended seating system (e.g., ramp, stairs, narrow doors, etc.)?

- What is the client's current seating system (e.g., a standard chair like a stationary bed-side chair, geri-chair, standard wheelchair, scooter, electric wheelchair, etc.)?
- What function does the client currently perform in the seating system (e.g., propelling the wheelchair with his or her feet for mobility, performing ADL in the bathroom, community mobility, work, etc.)?
- Does the current seating system support optimal postural alignment for this client's needs (e.g., Does the chair provide correct width, depth, and height of both the seat and back support to provide adequate trunk support, even distribution of pressure, optimal upper-extremity mobility for propulsion, and no complaints of pain? Do the client's feet reach the floor to allow safe wheelchair propulsion using the lower extremities?)?
- For how long does the client regularly have to use the seating system to be at optimum function? Has this caused compensation of posture to complete tasks?
- Are the caregivers supportive of alternative positioning options? Can they realistically maintain the occupational therapy practitioner's recommendations (e.g., are staff able and willing to apply multiple positioning devices that might need to be removed and reapplied with each toileting episode? Can the caregiver assist the client in attaining a more aligned posture in bed? If family members—who are aging themselves—are involved, can they still mobilize the recommended positioning device?)?
- Are there any safety risks in the client's current seating system?
- Can the family assist in transporting the positioning system if needed?

### **Reimbursement**

- Will the client's insurance cover occupational therapy intervention for seating and positioning?

- What types of assistive devices are available to address positioning? What types of devices does the client's insurance cover?
- If the client resides in a skilled nursing facility, will the facility provide assistive devices, if needed?
- Is seating and positioning a new problem, or has therapy previously addressed the issue? Why does the client need intervention again? Was there a decline in function?
- What type of personal funds does the client have available to pay for the assistive devices if no other reimbursement sources are available?
- Have you provided the client with possible resources for obtaining funding for the assistive devices if the client has limited financial resources?
- Are there aging organizations or places of worship in the client's town that might assist in paying for the seating system?

When screening, evaluating, and treating older adults with positioning challenges, integrate the goals and objectives of the client, as well as his or her occupational performance, into the treatment sessions and approaches. Additionally, successful positioning requires participation not only from the client, but also from family members, caregivers, and facility staff. The recommended seating system should be easily carried out by all involved parties. In addition to educating the client on the final seating recommendations and how to use all equipment, it is beneficial for the occupational therapy practitioner to educate family members, caregivers, and staff during treatment sessions.

### **AOTA Resources**

American Occupational Therapy Association. (1998). The use of general information and assistive technology within occupational therapy (position paper). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 52, 870–871.

Berner, T. F. (2007, October 22). Overview of manual wheelchairs and what to consider when making seating and positioning selections, *OT Practice*, 12(19), CE-1–CE-8.

Buning, M. E. (2001). WheelchairNet: A comprehensive online resource [Electronic version]. *OT Practice*, 6(19), 16–19.

Krantz, G. C., Krantz, M. A., Christenson, M. A., & Lindquist, A. (1998). *Assistive technology: An illustrated guide to terminology*. Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association.

Mann, W. C., & Lane, J. P. (1995). *Assistive technology for persons with disabilities: The role of occupational therapy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Bethesda, MD: American Occupational Therapy Association.

Morress, C. (2006). Bottom-up or top-down? An occupation-based approach to seating [Electronic version]. *OT Practice*, 11(16), 12–17.

### Web Sites

- WheelchairNet  
[www.wheelchairnet.org](http://www.wheelchairnet.org)
- School of Health and Rehabilitation Services, University of Pittsburgh  
International Seating Symposium  
[www.iss.pitt.edu](http://www.iss.pitt.edu)
- Wheelchair Junkie  
[www.wheelchairjunkie.com](http://www.wheelchairjunkie.com)  
This Web site is maintained by a wheelchair user. Learn about wheelchairs and seating from the consumer's point of view.

- *Rehab Management*

www.rehabpub.com

*Rehab Management* is a free, online publication. The archive section contains a multitude of articles and featured rehabilitation products, including many on the topic of seating and positioning.

- Team Rehab. Reports

[www.wheelchairnet.org/WCN\\_ProdServ/Docs/TeamRehab/TRRArchive.html](http://www.wheelchairnet.org/WCN_ProdServ/Docs/TeamRehab/TRRArchive.html)

These reports are archived on the WheelchairNet.site. They cover diverse issues on the topic of rehabilitation and include multiple articles on seating and positioning.