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- [Supporting your child's mobility with assistive technology Easy Read \(PDF 7.1MB\)](#)

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for families and carers of children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability. It can teach you about assistive technology (AT) that may support your child's mobility needs.

Why is mobility important in young children?

Mobility in your child's early years helps to support their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development.

Mobility provides children with freedom of movement and helps them to learn to interact with their environment, exploring play and social opportunities. Movement is also vital in keeping their bodies healthy and functioning.

AT for mobility aims to support children to move around in different settings (like home, childcare, school and in the community). AT may include walking aids, wheelchairs, specialised footwear or orthoses.

Seeking early intervention support has shown to lead to better developmental outcomes.

Improving mobility early will allow a child to maximise their ability to play and interact with other children. It can also promote independence and may reduce their need for support from parents and other carers.

What assistive technology support options are available?

Research shows a range of AT may support your child's mobility. These AT supports may be available through your NDIS plan or [mainstream and community supports](#).

Your child and family may use more than one AT mobility support. Your child may also change AT supports as they grow and develop and their needs and goals change.

It's important to remember that supports will look different for every child and family. The key to the successful use of AT in your child's daily life is taking a family-centred approach. This means working with a team of professionals and family members where your child learns and develops their skills. For more information about the importance of a family-centred approach, refer to [ECI Best Practice Early Childhood Guidelines](#).

Your child's early childhood professional might suggest one or more of the AT supports listed below. The supports listed are not exhaustive and there may be other supports available.

Supporting your child's mobility with assistive technology

There are a range of evidence-based AT products to support mobility for children.

Does your child need support to walk?

If your child needs support with walking, there are professionals who can work with you and your child to find the best solutions.

Some AT supports may include:

- Walking aids such as walkers, gait trainers and walking sticks are devices used to support children to stand and walk. There are a range of devices available to provide different levels of support, depending on your child's needs. An experienced AT advisor (usually a physiotherapist) can support you to decide which walking aid is best suited for your child.
- Lower limb orthoses such as therapeutic footwear and foot orthoses are splints or wearable devices used to modify the structure or function of the hip, knee, ankle or foot. Orthotists and physiotherapists can help you understand the options and determine the best combination to meet your child's needs.
- Body orthoses or supportive garments made of elastane fibre, neoprene or other fabrics and elements may be used by children to promote alignment and support movement and mobility. Your allied health professional can help you decide if these are suitable.
- Prostheses are provided when a child has lost a part of their limb or has other limb difference (such as a short limb). Usually, your health provider will discuss whether a prosthesis is appropriate or would help.

Does your child need support for their upper limbs?

Upper limb orthoses are devices applied to the body to stabilise joints, improve alignment, prevent deformity, or reduce pain. These can aid in performance of certain functional tasks like holding a pencil.

Upper limb orthoses may be applied to the shoulder, elbow, wrist or hand. Some examples of upper limb orthoses include splints, slings, hinge-elbow braces and elbow clasps. An experienced AT advisor, usually an occupational therapist or orthotist, can help you decide which upper limb orthoses are best suited to your child's needs.

Does your child need support to move around?

Strollers are often used for young children. Most children with ongoing mobility needs will transition to a wheelchair during their early school years.

There are a range of strollers available.

- Basic strollers: are often used by parents, for children who find it tiring to walk longer distances. They can usually be folded for easy transportation in the car.
- Specialised strollers: have a range of seating options and accessories. They come in a range of sizes and often have inbuilt adjustment for growth. The seating may detach to fit to an indoor base for supportive seating at home.
- Recreational strollers: are for outdoor use. There may be accessories available depending on the terrains and recreational activity, and different sizes to support children of different ages.

Manual wheelchairs are manually operated or can be fitted with power-assist devices for individuals who need assistance with mobility. Wheelchairs come in three categories.

- Self-propelled wheelchairs: can be manoeuvred by the child themselves.
- Transit wheelchairs: need a carer or attendant to move it.
- Tilt and recline wheelchairs: have added functionality and allows a child to be tilted in space and/or reclined.

Powered mobility devices are wheeled supports that help children move around. There are very small, powered wheelchairs for infants and young children to offer an alternative method for independent movement.

These may be used together with other mobility equipment. They are generally an introductory powered mobility device for children. They may be part of a powered mobility training program to promote mobility in the child's everyday environment.

An AT Advisor, such as a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, can help you determine whether a powered wheelchair is suitable for your child.

It's important to consider if a stroller or wheelchair is more suitable for your child and family's needs and reassess these as your child grows. You should seek advice about the pros and cons of these from an AT Advisor.

Seating and accessories may be recommended by your AT advisor. These may include seat, back and head supports, belts and harnesses, foot supports and trays. Your AT Advisor can assess your child's seating needs and help you decide the best supports for your child.

Information about specialised seating devices is available in the Guide for supporting your child at home and in the community with assistive technology.

Supported transfers are devices to assist a child move between two positions such as their wheelchair and bed, or to the floor. This is often called a transfer. These aim to reduce manual handling requirements, improve safety and prevent injury to the parents or carers, for children who need help to move, or who have special or complex postural support needs.

These devices may include:

- slide sheets
- different types of hoists and slings
- transfer belts
- swivel boards
- adjustable height or wider change tables.

Does your child need support when travelling in a vehicle?

AT for travel or vehicle mobility includes devices or technology that supports your child when travelling in a vehicle such as a car, van, or bus.

This may include things like ramps, alternative child car restraints or child car seats and seat belts.

Travelling in a vehicle with a child who has a disability may require specific considerations. For example, a child may need additional physical supports to sit comfortably and safely during travel.

It's important to work together with your allied health professional to help identify safe travel strategies and the appropriate AT for your child's needs.

Safe travel in vehicles is regulated by states and territories. There are specialised health professionals (such as specialised OTs) who can provide advice if you need your vehicle modified. You can find more information in the [MACA Guide](#) and the [MACA state and territory road laws](#) .

Understanding when your child's AT may be a restrictive practice

When your child is provided with AT, it is intended to support their abilities and help them develop their skills and independence. In some cases, using AT or other methods to prevent a person from moving or doing something against their will is called 'restrictive practices'. It is important that family members and other people that care for your child understand the rules and regulations of restrictive practices. You can discuss these with your allied health professional. They can help you understand which rules or regulations need to be followed.

You can read more about restrictive practices on our webpage [Understanding behaviour support and restrictive practices](#) – for participants and in the report [Regulated Restrictive Practices with Children and Young People with Disability: Practice Guide 2021](#) .

Who should you talk to about mobility supports?

You should talk to your MyNDIS contact (who is your child's early childhood partner or planner), providers, AT Advisor (early childhood professionals such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, orthotist, orthoptist or orientation and mobility specialist), organisations who support people with disabilities and their families, peer supports, or other friends and family about AT to support mobility. [Read more about Questions to ask providers](#) .

Where else can you go for more information?

NDIS resources

- [Our Guideline - Assistive technology](#)
- [Our Guideline - Vehicle modifications and driving supports](#)

- [Vehicle modifications](#)
- [‘Would we fund it’](#)

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

- [Speak Up Resources](#)
- [NDIS Workforce Capability Framework](#)
- [NDIS Support Coordinators](#)
- [What do we mean by advice or an assessment?](#)

Other resources

- [Disability Gateway](#): has information and services for people with disability specific to AT. These include:
 - government programs and organisations that provide equipment
 - communication aids and services
 - using technology and staying connected
- [ARATA](#): Australian Rehabilitation & Assistive Technology Association has information about supporting and promoting best practice for rehabilitation and AT provision.
- [MACA](#): Mobility and Accessibility for Children in Australia Ltd has information about support and vehicle restraint products (including car seats) to ensure children with disabilities and medical conditions can travel safely and comfortably in vehicles.
- [Vision Australia](#): has information about technology, products and supports to assist with daily tasks, school and play.
- AT databases: have information about all forms of AT available in Australia (and sometimes internationally), with information and links to suppliers across Australia.
 - [AskNED](#)
 - [AT Chat](#)
 - [Kindred](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#): provides parents and carers with free, reliable, scientifically validated information. This information helps parents and carers keep their children healthy and developing well.
- [Reimagine Australia](#): has information for families on early childhood supports.

References

1. National Disability Insurance Agency 2023. ‘Assistive technology interventions to support children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability with their communication, mobility and independence. An Evidence Snapshot. Australia. Prepared by Armstrong R, Garrubba M, Sandford-Morgan E and Chandrakumar D.
2. [Raising Children’s Network](#) .

Disclaimer

This guide is designed to help you understand the range of AT supports for children with developmental delay or physical or intellectual disability. It does not imply that a specific support will automatically be included in your NDIS plan. Some supports may be provided outside of the NDIS. All of the supports included in your NDIS plan

must meet the reasonable and necessary criteria. You should read this guide alongside Our Guideline - Our Guideline - Assistive technology.