

The importance of correct seating in a care home



by Lisa Wardley, managing director, Repose Furniture

2. Older people in care homes are enabled to maintain and develop their personal identity.

However, for a resident to be engaged in activity when their mobility or standing is impaired, means that they are often restricted to completing all their activities in a seated position and this can be challenging. The chair they use then becomes critical, as it must meet their individual needs be this via a bespoke chair or perhaps through your care home having a suite of adaptable chairs that can be modified simply for any of the residents.

When choosing seating for your residents, keep four key factors in mind:

1. Seat Depth – Our femurs need to be well supported and allow for pressure across the whole of the thigh. If the chair is too deep, it will lead the resident to sit on the edge of the chair to place their feet on the floor and therefore provide no back support. If the chair is too short, there will be excessive pressure on the mid-thigh causing discomfort and possible pressure sores.

2. Seat height – To be able to engage in activity we need to have our feet planted firmly on the floor or a stable footrest. This allows residents to have good balance and enables them to engage their core muscles to keep a straight upright position.

- Seat height is too high, a resident is liable to slump in the chair to try and get their feet on the floor. This increases pressure on the bottom and requires the head to flex forward, thus reducing field of vision.

- Seat height is too low, the knees are pushed upwards causing significant pressure on the ischial tuberosity and making it uncomfortable to sit whilst carrying out activities.

3. Seat width – If the seat is too wide the resident may to slump to one side. Not only does this cause additional pressure to one hip, but it also locks in the arm on the slumped side reducing the ability to carry out a chosen activity bilaterally.

4. Reduced transfers – Hoisting residents with dementia can be a very traumatic experience as it is an alien activity and can cause agitation and challenging behaviour. Therefore, reducing the moves to a minimum may be essential, and a chair with the ability to porter from room to room could be considered.

NICE (2008) recommends 'older people should be offered regular group and/or individual sessions to identify, construct, rehearse and carry out daily routines and activities that can help to maintain or improve their health'. However, without appropriate seating this recommendation will not be achievable.



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As we age it is vital we continue to be involved in the activities we have been engaged with throughout our lives, be that reading, knitting, card games or even running or cycling. Research indicates that purposeful activity supports:

- Reduced stress and agitation
- Improved verbal and non-verbal communication
- Improved physical function
- Maintenance of personal identity

Evidence also shows that reduced activity leads to occupational deprivation, resulting in residents being withdrawn and fatigued, agitated or violent.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE 2013) recognised the need for activity in their quality standards, which include:

1. Older people in care homes should be offered opportunities throughout their day to participate in meaningful activities that promotes their health and mental wellbeing.