

# CHOOSING A CHAIR

Armchairs are often designed for comfort rather than ideal postural support. In this pamphlet, you will find some hints that will help you choose a comfortable and supportive armchair.



## CONTACT

### **NELSON**

Phone 03 546 1801

Fax 03 546 1597

### **MARLBOROUGH**

Phone 03 520 9927

Fax 03 520 9906

*The Occupational Therapy Service takes no responsibility for purchase of inappropriate chairs.*

## CHOOSING A CHAIR INFORMATION GUIDE



# FACTORS TO CONSIDER

## SEAT HEIGHT

When seated your feet should be firmly planted on the floor in front of the chair. Your knees and hips should be bent at approximately a 90-100 degree angle.

## SEAT BACK ANGLE

Often a chair is designed to be slightly higher at the front than at the back. Make sure that the seat is not angled too deeply at the back as it makes it difficult to get out of the chair.

## SEAT BASE

The seat base should be long enough to support the entire length of the thigh. If it is too short it does not provide the support required and could cause discomfort behind the knees. If the seat base is too long it encourages poor posture and a 'slumping' position whereby the base of your spine will be rounded.

When trialling a chair sit your bottom as far back as it will go. Your feet should still be flat on the floor at the 90 degree angle. It may help for someone to measure the length from your bottom along your thigh to behind your knee to get the correct measurement for you.

## LOWER BACK

Your lower back should be well supported by the chair, holding it in the correct semi upright position rather than swayed or rounded. The normal curve of the spine below the waist curves inward meaning a supportive seat back should ideally have an outward curve for this part of the spine (lumbar). Often soft comfy armchairs have no lumbar/low back support and may often be concave, encouraging a rounded posture. If this is the case you may find a half lumbar roll placed behind your back may assist to maintain this position.

## POOR SITTING TOLERANCE

If you have difficulty keeping an upright posture in sitting or tend to lean to one side, make sure that you fit 'snugly' into the chair. If it is too wide it will encourage leaning to one side.

## ARMRESTS

Select a chair with good solid armrests to help you get in and out. Check that they are the full length of the chair so that you don't have to reach backwards to grab them. Check armrest height – shoulders and elbows at 90 degrees. If they are too high there is the tendency to raise and 'hunch' your shoulders that could result in muscle tension or discomfort.

# CHECKLIST

- Knees, hips, shoulders and elbows at 90-100 degrees.
- Seat not angled too low at back.
- Support along entire length of thigh.
- Supports lower back.

