



Are you sitting Comfortably?

A WILDLY UNDERESTIMATED AREA OF an occupational therapists' role is finding the right seating solution for your client.

The vast implications of improper seating can lead to many devastating conclusions and not only prolong the rehabilitative process but damage the overall health of a patient.

Two giants in the bespoke seating market, Seating Matters and Repose both have a wide array of theories and resolutions to help even the most inexperienced of OTs combat the threat of improper posture and other, even fatal, concerns that clients can face.

Martina Tierney, occupational therapist and Clinical Director of Seating Matters, has spent over 30 years as a therapist, travelling the world to find seating solutions to help her patients. She took matters into her own hands when she found that there was precious little out there and, alongside her family and expert clinical team, created an easy to use, multi-adjustable chair, which was fully adaptable and customisable to suit individual patient's needs.

Repose is also one of the UK's leading manufacturers and suppliers of bespoke adjustable furniture

and works closely with Kate Sheehan from The OT Service, one of the UK's leading independent OTs, when developing new products as Managing Director Lisa Wardley explained: "Here at Repose we pride ourselves on listening to and acting upon comments and suggestions from our end users, retailers and healthcare professionals, after all they are the ones at the sharp end so to speak. Kate has been working with us for over a year and her insight into what OTs look for has been invaluable to us as a company".

What should OTs look for in a seat?

Due to the in-depth clinical research at Seating Matters, Martina urges OTs to look out for these things when choosing a seat for a client:

BACK ANGLE RECLINE It is a crucial element of seating for the support and positioning of those with certain abnormal postures, preventing the patient sliding from the chair. It accommodates users with limited hip flexion and facilitates a change in position of the client's hip angle, achieving a more comfortable position.

SEAT DEPTH ADJUSTMENT Adjusting the seat depth facilitates maximum surface area contact so the individual's weight is properly loaded in the chair and pressure redistribution is optimised. The ability to adjust seat depth in a chair is a great function for a multi-user environment allowing one chair to suit many different client needs. For example, patients with long legs require the ability to adjust the seat depth to properly load the femurs into the chair.

A FOOTPLATE A height-adjustable footplate allows for the client's feet to be loaded. It should never be >



› an accessory or an option, it should be compulsory. 19% of a person's body weight goes through the feet while seated and fully loaded, resulting in less pressure exerted through the ITs and other high risk areas.

REMOVABLE CUSHION It offers flexibility to add an alternative pressure management cushion best suited to the patient's needs without compromising the chair's dimensions. A cushion needs to be reviewed at least every 18 months to ensure it continues to provide pressure redistribution.

TILT IN SPACE Tilt in Space will improve posture, including head and trunk control and assists positive or corrective positioning for those with a kyphotic posture. Preferably 45 degree angle tilt is recommended as this has been proven to reduce pressure as it is the optimum angle for an effective weight shift.

Repose's Lisa detailed just what damage poor seating can do to someone:

- **Muscle shortening** - this can happen when muscles are held in one position for long periods of time, leading to loss of permanent muscle length resulting in contractures.
- **Tissue damage** - weight or pressure concentrated in one area of the body for prolonged periods can cause skin integrity issues and ultimately skin breakdown.
- **Pain** - caused by tension in the joints, muscles and ligaments, this often occurs if a client cannot move themselves into different positions on a regular basis.
- **Increased ataxia** - if a client does not feel supported in a comfortable position, the anxiety of maintaining a good seating position can lead to increased involuntary movements.
- **Swallowing difficulties** - if the chin is too low and shoulders slumped your ability to swallow is compromised.
- **Communication difficulties** - articulation of the jaw due to the chin being lowered into the chest can cause pressure of the windpipe which can inhibit speech.
- **Breathing difficulties** - if the chest is slumped, a client is unable to expand their lungs fully, resulting in shorter, less productive breathing.
- **Loss of balance** - if the chair is

not supportive this can lead to poor balance, which will impact all activities a client chooses to carry out whilst in the chair.

- **Reduced activity performance** - if a chair does not allow a client to carry on their day-to-day activities, for example, reading, drinking or playing cards, this can impact someone's mental well-being.

How important is an OTs knowledge of seating?

Seating Matters have been at the forefront of revolutionary clinical research developed in partnership with leaders in health science research, Ulster University. The clinical trial explored the effectiveness of specialist seating provision within care environments and how it could have a positive impact on the health and well-being of the chair users and their caregivers.

The findings from the trial were staggering. They revealed that following assessment and individualised seating provision, Seating Matters chairs can reduce pressure ulcer incidence by 88.3%. In addition, correct seating and positioning contributes not only to the prevention but also assists in the treatment of pressure ulcers. Other health benefits were notable, including:

- Increase in oxygen saturation levels by 95%
- Increased functional ability
- Improved posture and a reduction in the development of postural deformities or sliding/falling from the chair
- Improvement in respiration, elimination, digestion and other psychological functions
- Improved quality of life and psychological well-being
- Improved communication and interaction
 - Improved comfort and reduction in pain levels
 - A significant reduction in expenditure on staff labour and treatment of pressure ulcers



Educating clinicians through increasing their knowledge of the subject is vital. The Clinician's Seating Handbook is one way of doing that. It is the only handbook on clinical seating provision in the world published and it takes you through the basics of posture, pressure management and the correct assessment and provision of seating. There is also a YouTube channel with educational and practical video blogs hosted by

Seating Matters clinicians, covering a range of topics from 'How to Reduce Preventable Falls from Chairs', to 'Seating Bariatric Patients' and other useful resources.

They also have seating specialists available in every area across the country that can provide a free Lunch and Learn training session for your team or individual assessment for a patient.

How can the correct seat help a client?

The correct chair not only has a direct impact on a person's comfort and mobility, it can effect wider measures such as quality of life, psychological well-being, functional independence, physiological functioning and general health. Patients who are unable to mobilise or reposition themselves independently will spend long periods of time in a seated position. If this position is uncomfortable or the individual's posture limits function and communication, the individual may sit for long periods of time unable to communicate their discomfort or pain or unable to seek assistance.

It is well documented that prolonged discomfort and pain as well as reduced functional independence can lead to depression, lethargy, learned helplessness and poor motivation which will impact the patient's recovery and rehabilitative progress.

Poorly fitting or inadequately adjusted seating will encourage the development of harmful postures which may impede function, communication, respiration and digestion as well as increasing the risk of unnecessarily developing a pressure ulcer.

Don't underestimate the importance of your role in doing a clinical assessment. You should identify the needs of that person and help inform their decision on the type of chair they require to meet their needs both now and in the future.

Repose outlined a definitive guide to what to think about before settling on a seating solution for a client:

PERSON Assessment of individual needs, including, but not limited to:

- Width
- Depth
- Height
- Arm height
- Pressure requirements
- Condition



ENVIRONMENT

Assessment of the environment including, but not limited to:

- Does the chair need to be moved?
- Can it be easily maintained?
- Manoeuvrability of chair on the flooring in the environment it will be used
- Does it match existing furniture?
- Can carers/family use it with ease?

TASK

- Does the chair allow for engagement in activities that need to be completed and more importantly those the client wishes to engage in?

PRODUCT

- Fit for purpose
- Does it meet weight limit requirements?
- What maintenance agreements are there?
- How much will it cost initially and for on-going servicing?
- Where is it made?

If you would like more information or advice on choosing the appropriate seat for a client you can contact Repose and Seating Matters on the details below:

Repose, 0844 7766 001
www.reposefurniture.co.uk
Seating Matters, 020 7559 3555
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