



## What do we know about postural care for people with learning disabilities and severely impaired motor function?



If someone's body shape changes it can be very bad for their health. Postural care can stop body shape changes. It is often provided by families.



People who have difficulty moving need postural care. Carers need knowledge and equipment to provide postural care. We do not know much about postural care for people with learning disabilities.



In the UK some people have tried to improve postural care for people with learning disabilities. We need to know the best way to provide postural care for people with learning disabilities.

## Postural care for people with learning disabilities and severely impaired motor function

Postural care is a way of preserving and re-establishing body shape for people with movement difficulties<sup>1</sup>. Sustained poor positioning can have severe and life threatening complications for people who have a limited ability to change position<sup>2,3</sup>. Over the past 15 years, there has been increased awareness of the need to provide postural care over the entire 24-hour period and the need for a person and family centred approach with co-production of postural care plans. This usually involves: adaptive seating and/or moulded wheelchairs, night time positioning equipment (NTPE), moving and handling techniques along with advice and training across all settings that the person accesses<sup>2</sup>. The importance of the issue of postural care for people with learning disabilities has been highlighted in a number of reports that note gaps in services and the need to provide postural care interventions to prevent postural deformities from developing<sup>1,4-6</sup>.

This briefing outlines evidence on postural care for people with learning disabilities who have severely impaired motor function. This is based on a scoping review of 23 research studies published from 1990-2016<sup>7</sup>.

- there is only a small amount of research on postural care that specifically focuses on people with learning disabilities
- there are no studies on the number of people with learning disabilities who need postural care
- there is a lack of research regarding NTPE and 24-hour postural care
- service related research is limited to studies on the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding postural care and no studies were found on how best to provide postural care services for people with learning disabilities
- across the UK, there are examples of innovations in practice that aim to improve postural care for people with learning disabilities<sup>8-13</sup> but peer reviewed research relating to these innovations is lacking

It has been suggested that effective 24-hour postural care can prevent deformity and avoid the negative health and quality of life implications associated with poor posture as well as avoid invasive interventions such as surgery for scoliosis, which is frequently associated with major complications. The lack of evidence to support these claims needs to be addressed urgently, including a focus on the specific issues that may arise in relation to postural care for people with learning disabilities. Future research should look at how best postural care interventions can be employed to help improve the health and quality of life of people with learning disabilities.

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