

In the year 2000 at the age of 28, I received a diagnosis from my neurologist of Limb Girdle MD, which was later updated to Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM). I recently reached the point where I had to make the transition from a manual chair to an electric chair, something I had been putting off as in my mind I saw it as a step backwards. In the end though, I had no choice, as struggling to persist with the manual chair had taken its toll on my shoulder and I had been experiencing a fair amount of pain and discomfort. After shopping around with my OT and visiting a few different businesses, we found Patient Handling in Marrickville, where I found two pieces of equipment that I thought would help relieve some of the physical demands being placed on my body during day to day life. As it turned out though, the impact they have had on my life has been extensive.

The first piece of equipment was a ceiling mounted hoist which I can use for transfers from my bed to chair, or shower chair. More importantly though, it allows me to stand which enables me to dress independently and then to remain standing for twenty minutes or so, which is an amazing feeling being able to straighten your legs and move around. The other piece of equipment was an electric wheelchair called a TA-IQ. This chair has a mechanism that raises you in a seated position - high enough to reach the top cupboards in a kitchen, or the top shelves in a supermarket, or the be able to see over those glass cabinets at a butcher or Deli and speak to someone eye to eye. It also allows you to lower yourself quite low to the ground. This range of height adjustment means transferring from surface to surface can be performed more comfortably. It also comes with a range of options including power leg raisers, a power backrest, and a tilt in space function allowing you adjust your position throughout the day, relieve pressure and remain comfortable.

After applying to Enable for my electric wheelchair, I faced a lengthy waiting period during which MDNSW put me in touch with FlexEquip, who were kind enough to loan me an electric chair for 3 months. It was during that time that I discovered the real potential of an



Andrew in control with his new chair.

electric chair. It gave me so much more freedom than I could have anticipated. On my first trip outside in it, I went down to the local park nervously and crossed a few bumps and inclines, then strayed off onto the grass, which I found fascinating. For years, I had been bound to the footpath or solid ground by my manual chair, and now a whole range of options opened up before me. I realised I could walk a dog now, by tethering it to the frame of the electric chair and I would be able to walk it on grass, potentially following it around the park, even pick up its poo (if I really had to!). I also realised that with an electric chair I could now access the entire city of Sydney; I could cross roads unaided; I didn't have to worry about a whole range of obstacles or barriers that plagued me in my manual chair. The next day I woke up early, and I was off! I went from Redfern where I live, down to Central Station, then to Haymarket to Paddy's Markets, then to Darling Harbour. I went down a steep ramp onto a floating dock and looked over the boats, up close and personal, then I went through Chinatown in search of lunch - and I did all of this by myself and at my own pace!

Ever since then, I have been pushing the envelope. I can get up early now, catch a train down to Circular Quay, grab a coffee, jump on the Manly Ferry and head out across the harbour to Manly. I sit there and watch the surf, drive along the foreshore and smell the ocean air and relax and take it all in. Doing this makes me feel like I am participating in life instead of just waiting for something to happen.

"I feel like I am in control again after years of feeling that the controls had been taken from me by my disease."

Initially, I was afraid that an electric chair would mean I was surrendering more of myself to this disease, but as it turns out the electric chair has helped me regain a large portion of normal life that this disease had taken away from me.

Andrew Grant,
43yrs, member MDNSW