



**Choosing the Mobility Device That's Right For You-**  
**Part 1- The Wheeled Assessment**  
**Featuring: Jean Minkel, PT, Independent Care System of NY &**  
**Toni Spottswood**

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**Jean Minkel:**

MS as a disability involving the nervous system can impact balance and fatigue is the other reason that people will recognize that they're falling more frequently, it's causing them not to go out and do things, and they'll start with perhaps an ambulatory device, a walker or a cane, and when the walker doesn't feel as secure they may be interested in wheeled mobility.

And it gives them a place where they can extend their mobility, particularly outside their home where they want to engage in social activities that they maybe have pulled away from a little bit because of the fear of falling.

**Toni Spottswood:**

It was about 10 or 11 years ago that I started to think I would need a wheelchair of some kind because I was on crutches and I took a really bad fall in my house, hit my head and I decided uh-oh, I'd better sit down before I fall down and really hurt myself badly.

Fortunately or unfortunately I didn't have professional advice until after two years after I was in the wheelchair that I initially got into. So I was making all my own decisions and um, a lot of them were based on vanity and so the first thing I had was, I think I went from walking normally and sort of leaning on buildings and propping myself up because my balance was really bad. I went from there straight to crutches.

**Jean Minkel:**

Unfortunately a wheelchair is not a wheelchair is not a wheelchair, although if you stay up late enough and see TV commercials, you may think so. There's so many factors. One of which is just your body size. One size does not fit all. In addition, we as therapists, particularly occupational and physical therapists really look at what your functional needs are. In addition where's your, what are your environmental needs? So where are you going to be using the chair? What is it that your body needs in terms of support?

**Toni Spottswood:**

I didn't know where to turn. Somebody suggested that I call the MS Society and I did, and that was when I started getting professional advice about wheelchairs and things. And um, the, the physical therapist at ICS took one look at my wheelchair immediately the first time she say me she said you need a better wheelchair than that. That's not supporting you properly

**Jean Minkel:**

So as a physical therapist, I really look at three different areas. What's your sitting balance? Are you able to sit by yourself without any external supports? If your trunk doesn't have the trunk muscles, you may need extra support built into the chair.

The second area of concern is, is your skin integrity. That if your sensation isn't as uh, attuned, you don't shift around as much or at risk for pressure sores. We can give you really good cushioning as well as the ability to change your position while you're sitting, whether it's teaching you how to move or putting power seating in the chair itself.

And then thirdly actually using the chair. Getting mobility training. Which type of chair would work best for you? Using a joystick, sitting in a power chair, if you have the upper extremity control can you use a scooter?

Do you know how to negotiate a scooter safely so you don't tip over and if you're really interested and have the ability of your upper extremities, manual wheelchairs give an option that's easy for transportation, it's more accessible for places that maybe just have one more step, but the setup of a manual

chair makes all the difference between being able to have somebody else push you or you being a very efficient self-propeller.

There's a societal view that once you're in a chair, you aren't as independent as somebody who is able to walk. Interestingly, when you actually talk to people who have embraced mobility, and wheeled mobility in particular, they acknowledge that while they might have been fearful, they didn't want to appear to be giving up; didn't want to give in to the disability. They didn't want to be associated with the disabled. They found that the chair allowed them the ability to get back out and do things that they had slowly retracted from being involved in.

So when I talk to people after particularly they've gotten their first mobility device, there is this acknowledgement of oh, I was so fearful and I didn't really want to do it. And boy, what an advantage it's given me back now that I can get around and go to places I want to go to.