

AlphaCare II®

Supporting Health & Social Care Professionals with their seating provision and meeting equipment criteria.

Clinical Justification & Case Study

CareFlex

The AlphaCare II

The AlphaCare II is our all-new comfortable yet robust seating system, developed with a key emphasis on safety and stability.

Introduction

The AlphaCare II The chair has been designed for individuals with postural instability and significant movements, such as those with Huntington's disease, dementia, and other neurological and neuromuscular conditions, in all health and social care settings.

Its linked seat and back recline function adjusts the seat angle as the back reclines, promoting postural stability and pelvic positioning. The contoured back supports a midline position, aiding physiological function and engagement. Supportive curved armrests provide lateral feedback for added security whilst offering protection for the upper limbs. The ergonomic block leg rest supports the lower limbs, promoting comfort and energy conservation.

The leg rest block, secured by the intuitive CareFlex EasySecure system, is easily removable for transfers and activities. Reflexion® foam in the seat and leg rest also addresses the pressure care needs of individuals with limited movement.

The AlphaCare underwent a rigorous two-year trial to ensure it met the highest standards of safety, stability, and seating tolerance. This extensive testing period allowed for design refinements based on user feedback and safety assessments. The final design includes advanced features that ensure unmatched user safety and stability, making the AlphaCare II® a revolutionary option for those with specialised postural care needs in sitting.

Clinical Need

When an individual's ability to achieve good sitting posture is affected, either through illness, injury, disability or disease, it can have a significant impact on their health and well-being. Specialist seating aims to allow individuals, who might otherwise have difficulty, to achieve their optimum sitting posture to sit out comfortably, interact with their environment, participate in activities of daily living, and enhance physiological function.

Top tip: Check out the CareFlex website for detailed information on specific postural challenges and how specialist seating can help.

The AlphaCare has been developed for individuals who present with postural instability and/or significant movements including those that may be severe:

- For cases where safety in sitting is critical; without specialist seating the individual will be at risk of serious injury or death.
- Seating provision is required to promote comfort and a sense of security.
- Primary goals include stability, appropriate support, optimum physiological function, and pressure care.

The AlphaCare meets the following chair requirements:

- Postural support and a range of accessories available to ensure optimum set-up for the individual user.
- Safely supports the user to engage in everyday life and improve their well-being.
- Option to upgrade the seat cushion to WaterCell Technology to reduce the risk of pressure injury.

Top tip: For individualised prescriptions for users with more complex postural needs, consider the MultiAdjust, HydroFlex or SmartSeat Pro II.

Seating Objectives

The AlphaCare effectively balances four key objectives for specialist seating provision:

1. Comfort
2. Function
3. Postural care
4. Pressure management

The AlphaCare achieves this by enabling the user to meet the basics of good sitting posture:[1]

- The body is conformed to the supporting surface symmetrically.
- Body weight is distributed equally over the maximum surface area.
- A balanced and stabilised body that can adjust to change.
- Body segments are supported and aligned as much as is possible.
- Upper limbs are free from their load bearing role for function.

Comfort

Comfort is key for quality of life, and for this reason it is the top priority at CareFlex. Comfort may seem an easily achievable goal but everyone has their own ideas on what being comfortable actually means. To some it could mean feeling safe, to others it could mean feeling energised, to those using other specialist equipment it could mean the opportunity for some freedom, and to those who experience pain it could mean finally being able to relax.

The challenges experienced by individuals with postural care needs can make it difficult for them to sit comfortably. Individuals with complex disabilities, such as Huntington's disease or dementia, can present with abnormal muscle tone and involuntary movements, which are associated with painful spasms and postural instability. Comfort is equally important for individuals who experience a more sedentary lifestyle, as spending prolonged periods in a seated position can result in stiffness and chronic pain.

Specialist seating that promotes comfort and feelings of safety can not only enhance an individual's daily life but also increase tolerance of a desired seated position and compliance with equipment. If an individual isn't comfortable then they may not use the chair regardless of the clinical benefits.[2] Consistency of use is crucial for achieving outcomes and thus reducing the risk of secondary complications.

Top tip: Comfort is subjective. In order to achieve comfort, the individual must be involved throughout the assessment and prescription process. They are at the centre and we need to ensure that their views are respected, along with all those involved in their care.



Function

Specialist seating is not only important for protecting the body segments and reducing the risk of secondary complications but also encouraging normal functional movement and the promotion of independence. Independence is crucial for an individual's well-being and is an important factor in living a fulfilling life.
Freedom of movement is achieved through effective stabilisation of the pelvis and trunk[3] as proximal stability is a requirement for distal control and freeing the upper limbs from their load bearing role. A stable posture has been shown to help an individual engage more fully in social activities at home, school or work, and as part of the community.[4]

Energy management is a critical part of promoting both comfort and function. Fatigue can affect all aspects of an individual's life and can significantly restrict their ability to engage in daily living, as well as having a negative impact psychologically and socially.[5] An unsupported posture can cause fatigue by making inefficient use of the body structure. Gravitational forces can also make sitting effortful for those who present with muscle weakness and abnormal muscle tone.

Fatigue, if unmanaged, can be associated with significant postural challenges, including kyphoscoliosis, posterior pelvic tilt and contractures.

Early implementation of fatigue management strategies into daily life is critical, and could reduce the impact and the probability of fatigue becoming chronic.[6] The appropriate use of specialist seating can encourage energy conservation, making it easier for individuals to live a meaningful life. Specialist seating systems allow users to be more involved in activities of daily living, including interaction and engagement, due to the opportunity to rest and recuperate resulting in more energy throughout the day.

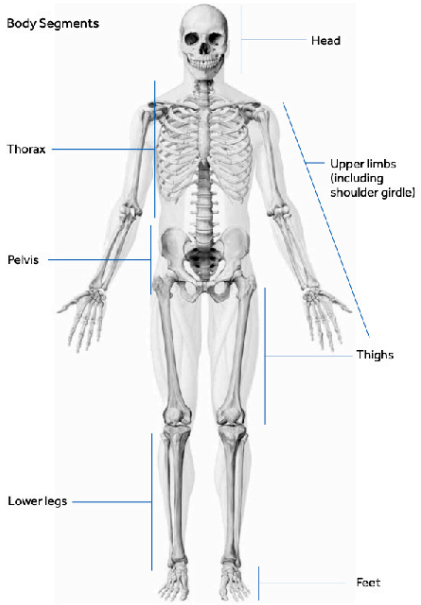
Postural Care

Postural care is the use of any technique to minimise postural abnormality[7] and is evidently linked to an individual's ability to achieve their seating objectives. Lack of postural care and prolonged abnormal sitting postures can cause tension on the body and increase the risk of significant secondary complications, such as exacerbated pain and postural deterioration.[8] Proper positioning has demonstrated that it can decrease fatigue whilst helping to alleviate chronic discomfort and maximise function.[9] As the body structure is supported, and the segments work together efficiently, the user will experience improved comfort, stability, functional movement, and energy conservation.

Top tip: Effective postural management targets all body segments:[1] pelvis, thorax, upper limbs, head, thighs, lower legs, and feet.

A major goal in postural management is to promote good health and enhance autonomic nervous system function.[10] A person's inability to sit upright can result in increased dependence and decline in overall health over time, primarily reflecting altered physiological function.[11] Trunk asymmetry and poor head position can impair respiration, cardiac efficiency, swallow function, and digestion. Consequently, increasing the risk of aspiration, infection, and any related hospital admission.

An appropriate seating system can provide the optimum position for respiratory and circulatory function.[8] An upright sitting position can also facilitate a normal swallowing pattern[12] and improve components of eating and drinking behaviour by maintaining good head alignment.[13]



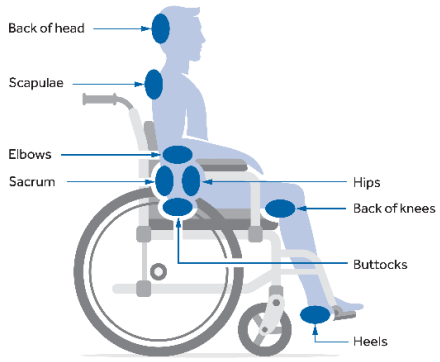
Top tip: The pelvis is the foundation for a good sitting posture as it dictates what happens to the body segments above and below. Positioned at the person's core, it acts as a support system for the entire body. The pelvis should be stabilised in all planes of movement. The aim is to correct the pelvis if it can be corrected; however, any fixed pelvic challenges must be accommodated.

Reducing costs is also a long-term benefit of appropriate postural management.[14] It can reduce costs associated with hospital admission, pressure injuries and infection. It reduces the need for invasive and expensive interventions too.

Pressure Care

Posture and pressure are inextricably linked; body posture and positioning have a direct influence on the pressure going through specific body sites.[15] Even in the gold standard sitting position, body weight is distributed as follows:[16]

Through buttocks and thighs: 75%
Through the feet: 19%
Through the arms of the chair: 2%
Through the back: 4%



The body can only withstand high interface pressures for a short period of time, and when loading of tissues is unequal, and/or pressure isn't regularly relieved, pressure ulcers can occur.[17] There are also a number of contributing or confounding factors, including pressure, shear forces, friction and moisture, associated with pressure ulcers.

Everyone is potentially at risk of developing a pressure injury.[18] The impact of a pressure injury is profound, with individuals being affected physically, psychologically, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and financially.[19]

Top tip: Professional guidance from a Tissue Viability Nurse or District Nurse may be indicated.

A key intervention of pressure care is pressure redistribution; regular repositioning is critical for those deemed at risk of developing a pressure injury as it is believed to be one of the most effective methods for preventing skin damage.[15] The opportunity to sit out can offer a much-needed change of position to encourage blood flow and redistribute pressure. Specialist seating systems aim to reduce the risk of pressure injuries by distributing the user's body weight evenly throughout the chair over the maximum surface area with posture supported as aligned and symmetrical as possible.

Top tip: The linked seat and back recline function can aid repositioning with the aim of redistributing pressure regularly as part of the individual's 24-hour posture and pressure management plan.

Appropriate management or, better still, prevention of pressure injuries can not only improve an individual's outcomes and quality of life, but it can also reduce the costs to health and social care services benefiting the wider community.

Specialist Seating Provision

Once an assessment is completed, Health & Social Care Professionals will need to justify their specialist seating prescription. Clinical justification is important as it aids in decision-making, prioritising and securing funding for equipment. It is the opportunity for Health & Social Care Professionals to advocate for the best outcomes.

To clearly demonstrate an individual's need for specialist seating, and to comprehensively convey the clinical justification, a funding request should:

- Be holistic and, where possible, have a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Identify the seating needs, considering the aims and objectives of the individual user, their support network and the environment.
- Present the clinical findings and prove how the chair can meet the seating needs, but also state the risks of not prescribing the chair.
- Back up any claims with evidence, including research, guidelines and legislation.
- Outline past and current interventions to demonstrate that less costly interventions have been considered.
- Demonstrate clearly the cost effectiveness of prescribing the chair and the cost implications of not prescribing the chair.

The AlphaCare II

AlphaCare Seating Solutions

The all-new AlphaCare offers comprehensive seating solutions, due to a range of functions and accessories, which will enable individual users to achieve their seating objectives:

Reliability

- Since 1995 CareFlex has been collaborating with Health & Social Care Professionals to develop innovative and effective specialist seating; CareFlex understand the importance of balancing comfort, function, postural support and pressure care.
- CareFlex have confidence and pride in their specialist seating and the positive impact they know it can have on people's lives. They have therefore submitted their products for independent testing and evaluation over the years, including pressure mapping and published clinical research. For further information, a copy of the summaries can be obtained from the CareFlex website: https://www.careflex.co.uk/info-centre/clinical-evaluations/.

Robustness & Durability

- The AlphaCare provides high levels of comfort and the robust construction quality associated with CareFlex to support individuals with significant and/or severe movements.
- The maximum user weight and safe working load is 160kg.
- The four castors on the chair, including two locking rear castors, have sealed bearing hubs for enhanced durability and smoother manoeuvrability.
- The leg rest also has four castors, with the two at the front being fully braked.
- For peace of mind the AlphaCare comes with a Two Year Warranty

Infection Prevention & Control

- Specialist seating systems within health and social care environments can be a cause of cross-contamination and therefore infection prevention and control (IPC) must be considered during the assessment and prescription processes.
- Vapour permeable fabric to the seat and back rest, and a waterproof interliner to the cushion, can aid IPC measures.
- Hook & loop free covers with j-strip covering technology can help meet the demands of infection prevention and control.
- Covers are fully removable to aid thorough cleaning of the armrests, seat, leg rest and footplate.

Linked Seat and Back Recline*

- The AlphaCare's linked seat and back recline function promotes comfort and feelings of security within the chair; as the chair reclines, the seat angle adjusts to encourage postural stability and optimum pelvic positioning.
- There are three factory set options for back angle, which will be determined at the assessment and can be adjusted in the field by a trained technician:

  A - 120°-150° (standard)
  B - 110°-140°
  C - 130°-160°

- The seat angle adjusts from a starting position of 20° from horizontal through to 35° when the recline function is fully utilised to continuously support the pelvis. In the simplest of terms, regardless of the option selected, as back recline moves through 30° of full range, the hip angle moves through 15° of range.
- Option A is the standard set-up and will be suitable for the majority of users to balance upright positioning and recline functionality. However, an individual who needs a chair to be able to complete activities of daily living in an upright position or who can only tolerate a mild recline may require Option B. Whereas, Option C may be indicated for an individual who requires a seating solution for the main objective of rest and relaxation.
- Depending on the back angle option that is selected, there are three hip angle ranges:

  A = 100°-115° (standard)
  B = 90°-105°
  C = 110°-125°

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Contoured Back Support

- The contoured back support encourages a mid-line position for those with mild to moderate postural care needs, to aid physiological function and engagement in activities. This may be indicated for users who present with limited sitting ability due to weakness, abnormal muscle tone or fatigue.
- It provides gentle lateral support for the upper trunk and centralises the posture with contoured pads; it will continue to support the individual in all recline positions.
- Padded armrests can provide further lateral feedback, and offer a level of protection for the user.

Pressure Care

- Reflexion® foam to the seat cushion and block leg rest can address the pressure care needs of individuals at risk of pressure injury. It reacts to body heat and uniquely moulds itself around the contours of the user. Interface pressure is reduced on critical parts of the body subjected to compression. Body weight is then distributed more evenly across the whole surface area of Reflexion.
- CareFlex WaterCell Technology® is available for individuals at an increased risk of pressure injury. It provides a reliable and dynamic solution, and enables the individual to achieve a stable and functional posture without compromising on pressure care and comfort. Water cells work by allowing the cushion to contour effectively around the user's body in response to movement. Visco-Elastic Memory Foam then moulds to the shape of the buttocks and thighs, distributing weight over a larger surface area and minimising pressure build-up under bony areas.
- Vapour permeable upholstery also works synergistically with the pressure redistributing cushions to provide continuous pressure care.

Soft Headrest

- A comfortable rectangular pillow that can support the head if an individual presents with weakness or fatigue, available in shallow and deep.
- Available with additional SecureFit straps to reduce sideways movement of the pillow, especially where active movements affect correct headrest placement.

Soft Profiled Headrest

- A contoured pillow that comfortably supports the shoulders, neck and head to encourage head alignment for interaction and optimum physiological function for users with reduced head control.

- Available with additional SecureFit straps to reduce sideways movement of the pillow, especially where active movements affect correct headrest placement.

Additional Head Supports

- Foam Headrest provides basic but firm lateral head support.
- In-line Headrest provides memory foam lining for full cranial support with cut-away sides for unobstructed sight and hearing.
- Neck Headrest has a deeper profile to give greater lateral control when indicated to encourage a midline position.

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Block Leg Rest*

- An effective and appropriately utilised leg rest can provide optimum lower limb positioning whilst promoting alignment and stability.
- The AlphaCare's addition of an ergonomic block leg rest that fully supports the lower limbs can promote extra safety, comfort and relaxation.
- The leg rest is securely fitted to the chair by a unique intuitive EasySecure attachment system to ensure it maintains a firm fixing to the chair even under extreme duress. It can be easily removed for transfers, repositioning or activities, especially for those who are more ambulant.
- The leg rest release and locking mechanism is located at the push handle for ease of use and reducing the risk of injury to the caregiver.
- The leg rest incorporates Reflexion® foam in the top surface for pressure management.
- The rear castors have been inset to provide improved manoeuvrability; there are two locking castors at the front.

Groin Harness*

- A groin harness is a positioning aid that can provide maximum pelvic control to help stabilise the position of the pelvis and prevent the user from sliding forward in the chair.

Padded Pelvic Belt*

- A padded pelvic belt is a positioning aid that can be used for anterior pelvic stabilisation. It can also be utilised as a safety belt when portering, if indicated.

Sliding Footplate

- Insufficient foot support can negatively impact on postural stability and pressure risk; individuals naturally seek support through the feet to obtain the proprioceptive feedback required.
- If indicated, a sliding footplate is available which provides comfort and support to the feet, especially during portering and manoeuvring around the environment.
- Available in narrow or wide. Select narrow if using with fully braked castors at the front of the chair and for increased space for transfer aids.



Support Network Considerations

- It is imperative that the individual's support network and the environment in which the chair will be used are considered to ensure compliance and consistency of use; the AlphaCare has been designed and engineered with this in mind.
- Four castors spread the chair's load over a larger surface area, aiding manoeuvrability of the chair within the user's environment.
- The linked seat and back recline function can aid positioning by utilising gravity to stabilise the pelvis at the back of the chair, reducing caregiver effort during moving and handling.
- The frame has also been developed for use with a variety of hoisting and transfer equipment with increased ground clearance for improved manoeuvrability.

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The AlphaCare II

Duncan's Story

Duncan is a 61-year-old gentleman who loves football and is an avid Rangers supporter. Duncan currently resides at a hospital as he requires 24-hour care, but has a very supportive and loving family who visit him regularly.

Duncan has a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, with a history of seizure activity. He has also experienced skin breakdown in the past. Duncan requires support with all activities of daily living, and is unable to mobilise independently. He is also unable to communicate verbally; therefore, he relies on his family to advocate for him. A modified diet is indicated due to swallow difficulties; Duncan also experiences hypersalivation.

Achieving a safe sitting position has historically been difficult for Duncan; prior to CareFlex involvement Duncan utilised a groin harness but would still manage to rotate fully within the chairs he has trialled and has been known to tip the whole seating system. He also habitually pulls at the arms of chairs and has damaged several due to aggressive wear and tear.

CareFlex spearheaded a chair trial with the aim of not only developing a groundbreaking specialist seating system but also determining the optimum seating solution to improve Duncan's quality of life. Duncan urgently required an intervention to keep him stable and secure when in sitting. On examination, Duncan presented with the following postural challenges, exacerbated by an inappropriate seating prescription:

- Postural instability
- Significant and severe movements
- Limited head and trunk control
- Fatigue

Consequently, Duncan was at serious risk of injury due to his movements in sitting. His inability to maintain an optimum sitting position, especially for eating and drinking, also increased his risk of aspiration and subsequent infection. It was critical to address his pressure injury risk too due to his history. Continued impaired posture and physiological function would inevitably result in decline in health, and ultimately reduced quality of life.

Duncan was identified as an ideal participant for the all-new AlphaCare chair trial. Feedback from him, his caregivers, and his clinical team provided invaluable insights into the challenges of significant postural instability and active movements on daily life. It became evident that the AlphaCare incorporates functions and features that promote the stability and security essential for Duncan and his support network:

- The linked seat and back recline function promotes postural stability, enhancing feelings of safety and managing Duncan's movements.
- The ability to stabilise the pelvis has a positive effect on Duncan's movements within the chair, and now limits his undesirable and often dangerous repositioning into a posterior pelvic tilt or full rotation.
- The addition of a groin harness with a nonslip attachment, following a risk assessment, further improves Duncan's postural stability.
- The contoured back support provides lateral feedback to promote a midline position without restricting active movement, critical to repositioning and reducing pressure injury risk.
- The ability to sit upright with the head supported enables safe eating and drinking, whilst a reclined position encourages periods of rest and relaxation to reduce Duncan's fatigue.
- The block leg rest fully supports Duncan's lower limbs to protect all body segments and distribute pressure as evenly as possible.
- The sliding padded foot plate adequately

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supports and protects the feet during manoeuvring to enable safe interaction around the environment, when required.
- Integrated pressure management with WaterCell Technology also encourages maximum support and equal weight distribution with the aim of reducing the risk of pressure injury due to prolonged periods of sitting.

Enhancing comfort, postural stability and security enables Duncan to manage his movements, keeping him safe within the chair. Utilising the AlphaCare's intuitive functions also promotes energy conservation to enable him to engage meaningfully with his family. There was a certainly a compromise required; it was a fine balance between achieving the gold standard posture and promoting safety. Ultimately, all involved in Duncan's care agreed that reducing Duncan's risk of serious injury was the key objective as it posed his greatest danger to quality of life.

Duncan's clinical team were taken aback by the success of the AlphaCare in keeping him stable and secure; it is the most suitable chair they have ever trialled with Duncan. They report that Duncan seems calmer and they believe he feels safe within the chair, which has resulted in a reduction in his significant and severe movements. Additionally, the chair remains intact with no evident damage as witnessed in previous specialist seating systems.

Driven by a deep dedication to Duncan's safety and wellbeing, CareFlex extended the trial not only to safeguard him but also to enhance the product development process through invaluable feedback. Recognising there was no alternative seating system that could ensure Duncan's security within the chair, CareFlex took compassionate action to improve his quality of life. The resulting comprehensive two-year trial period allowed for continuous refinement and deep engagement with Duncan, his caregivers, and the clinical team. This long-term commitment from Duncan and his support network underscores the exceptional praise for CareFlex, showcasing how the AlphaCare chair has truly and profoundly transformed lives for the better.

Specialist seating is not solely about achieving that one perfect posture, it is about finding an individual's optimum posture that enables them to live their life to the fullest; a true holistic approach.

At CareFlex, we strongly believe in our ethos: we strive to balance postural care and pressure management with the individual's own goals, whilst promoting comfort, safety and a meaningful life. Get in touch to arrange a free no-obligation assessment if you are supporting an individual who needs postural care in sitting. CareFlex are here to support you.

"Due to the level of Duncan's stress and distress every chair he previously had ended up torn and damaged within weeks. Duncan also tipped the chairs over which was a huge safety risk and meant he had to be nursed on constant 1:1 observations. The AlphaCare chair has provided much more support which has prevented it from tipping over and Duncan is able to be nursed on general observations which is less restrictive. The material is much more robust as well and less likely to be torn."

(Duncan's name has been changed to protect confidentiality)

*DISCLAIMERS

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The information given in this book represents current advice at the time of publication. It is intended as general information and guidance and is not a substitute for professional medical advice which should be sought for specific, individual cases. It is the responsibility of the treating clinician, relying on independent knowledge and skills, to determine the best intervention and method of application for the client.

An individual's ability to tolerate a leg rest will be dependent on their hamstrings muscles and knee range of movement; inappropriate elevation of the lower limbs can cause pain, a posterior pelvic tilt, and sliding down the chair increasing shear and friction forces.

The linked seat and back recline function should always be prescribed responsibly, ensuring that it is safe and appropriate for the user following a comprehensive assessment of posture and risk, with advice sought from the multi-disciplinary team where indicated. In some cases, this function will be contra-indicated, and could also increase shear and friction forces.

All belts and harnesses must also be prescribed, implemented and monitored responsibly following a comprehensive risk assessment. Please see the following for further information:

- Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) (2015) MDA/2015/018 All posture or safety belts fitted to supportive seating, wheelchairs, hoists and bathroom equipment London: MHRA
- British Standard (BS) (2019) 8625:2019 Selection, placement and fixation of flexible postural support devices in seating London: BSI

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