GUIDE

Will a wheelchair fit through my doorway?

Measure the clear opening with the door open, compare it to the chair's overall width, not its seat width, and know when a narrower chair will not solve it.

July 28, 2026 · 4 minute read



The short answer: measure the opening, not the door

Whether a wheelchair fits through a doorway comes down to two numbers: the **clear opening** of the doorway and the **overall width** of the chair. Both are routinely misread. A door sold as a certain width does not give you that much room to pass, and a chair described by its seat width is always wider than that seat.

It is worth getting this right before any money changes hands. It is also worth treating as more than a one-time check. Needs change, chairs change, and a home that works today may need another look later. That ongoing adjustment is what we mean by Mobility Adaptation.

What the clear opening really is

The clear opening is the usable gap when the door is open to 90 degrees. Measure from the face of the open door to the stop on the opposite side of the frame, which is the thin strip the door closes against. The door's own thickness and the stops both take space away, so the clear opening is always narrower than the door itself.

For reference, the ADA accessibility standards for public buildings require a minimum clear opening of 32 inches. Those standards do not apply to private homes, and many homes fall short of them. Interior doors are often narrower than the front door, and the bathroom door is frequently the narrowest in the house.

What the chair's width really is

Seat width tells you how the chair fits the person. It does not tell you how the chair fits the house. The figure you need is the overall width: the widest point of the chair, measured across the outside of the wheels or handrims.

- **Self-propelled manual chairs** have large rear wheels and handrims outside the frame, so they are noticeably wider than their seat.
- **Transport chairs**, which a companion pushes, have small wheels and are usually narrower overall for the same seat width.
- **Power chairs** vary widely by design, so the manufacturer's stated overall width is the only figure to rely on.

If you self-propel, your hands are on the handrims as you pass through. A chair that clears the frame by a hair will still scrape knuckles. You need working room on both sides, not just a number that is technically smaller than the gap.

Width is only half of it

A chair that fits a doorway head-on may not fit it in real life. Three things decide that:

- **The approach.** A doorway at the end of a straight run is easy. A doorway off a narrow hallway means turning as you enter, and then the chair's length and turning space matter as much as its width.
- **The threshold.** A raised sill or a change in flooring can stop small front casters, even when the width is fine.
- **The other side.** In a small bathroom, getting through the door is no use if there is no room to close it behind you or to turn toward the toilet or shower.

When buying a different chair will not solve it

This is the part most guides skip. Seat width is set by the person's body and posture, not by the house. If the right seat width produces a chair that is too wide for a doorway, **buying a narrower chair is not the answer**. A seat that is too tight is uncomfortable and can cause pressure problems over time. Trading that for a doorway is a poor exchange.

Switching to a transport chair to gain clearance has its own cost: the person can no longer move themselves. For someone who self-propels now, that is a loss of independence, not a neutral swap.

In these cases the thing to change is the doorway. The options, from least to most involved:

- **Offset hinges**, sometimes called swing-clear hinges, move the open door out of the opening and return roughly the door's thickness in clearance.
- **Removing the door**, or the door and its stops, where privacy allows.
- **Widening the frame**, which is building work and needs a contractor's assessment of the wall.

If the situation is not straightforward, an occupational therapist can assess the person and the home together. That advice is often worth more than any product.

What to measure and what to ask

- Measure the clear opening of **every doorway on the daily route**: entrance, bedroom, bathroom, kitchen. The narrowest one is your limit.
- Measure with the door open to 90 degrees, from door face to opposite stop.
- Note the height of each threshold and the width of any hallway you must turn from.
- Ask the seller for the chair's **overall width**, in writing, for the exact seat size you need. Do not accept seat width alone.
- Ask for the overall length and the turning space if any doorway involves a turn.
- Ask about the return policy before you buy, so the chair can be tried in the actual home.
- If the numbers are close, ask an occupational therapist or a contractor before you order anything.

General information, not medical advice. If fit, posture, pressure relief or fall risk is part of your decision, speak to an occupational therapist.

SILVERA MOBILITY

silveramobility.com

Silvera selects the best wheelchairs, walkers and mobility products for different needs. No giant catalog, no confusing choices, and a plain account of what is wrong with each one.