

Information Sheet

15 Equipment for Daily Living

If you are disabled, however slightly, some things such as turning on taps, holding a knife and fork or getting in and out of the bath can become more and more difficult. There are numerous gadgets, aids and items of equipment that can help with such problems. This information sheet describes what is available, from where, and how you can get it.

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What is equipment for daily living?

Equipment for daily living is the general name for all the aids and adaptations that can help you to continue living independently in your own home. There are also hundreds of simple gadgets that can help you perform everyday tasks more easily and safely. As these are not usually found in high street shops, you may not realise just what is available. Some examples of the gadgets and equipment you might find useful are given below.

In the bathroom

- Grab rails and bath seats can help you get in and out of the bath.
- You can get special seats that fix to the wall so you can have showers sitting down.
- Raised toilet seats and grab rails can make getting on and off the toilet a lot easier.
- Long-handled sponges, hairbrushes and make-up sponges can make your daily hygiene and beauty routines easier to manage.
- An electric toothbrush can make it much easier to clean your teeth.

In the kitchen

- 'Spike boards' will hold vegetables firm while you chop them.
- Non-slip mats will keep your plate still while you are cutting up food.
- Kettle and teapot 'tippers' will help you to pour hot drinks safely.
- A saucepan basket can make it easier for you to get vegetables out of the pan and drain them.
- Sliding shelves can help you reach the back of your cupboards.
- Jar openers can take the strain out of opening stiff jar tops.
- Electric tin openers can make opening tins easier.
- Plastic tap turners can help you turn stiff taps on and off.
- Fat handled cutlery can make it much easier to use a knife and fork.
- Two handled cups and mugs can be easier for people with poor grip.

In the bedroom

- 'Bed raisers' fit on to the feet of your bed, giving it extra height.
- Simple aids can help you to pull yourself into a sitting position in bed.
- Button-fasteners and zip-pullers can help you to get dressed.
- Dressing sticks allow you to pull stockings, tights, trousers, shirts and socks on and off without having to bend down.

In the living room

- Manually and electrically operated reclining chairs can help you to sit upright or lie back, and can also push you forward and support you while you stand up.
- ‘Chair raisers’ fit on to the legs of your chairs, giving them added height.
- Long-handled window openers can help you reach high window catches.
- Books are available in large print if you have poor sight. You can also get books, newspapers and magazines on audio tape from libraries and specialist organisations such as the **RNIB Talking Book Service**, **Calibre Audio Library** and **National Talking Newspapers and Magazines** (see pages 10–13 for contact details).

Around the house

- You can fit special handles on to plugs to take the strain out of pulling them out of sockets.
- Long-handled ‘grabbers’ can help you pick things up from the floor or from high shelves.
- Telephones with large buttons help if you have problems with your sight.
- Telephones that have a flashing light instead of a ringing tone can help if you have problems with your hearing.

Where to find out about equipment for daily living

If you would like more information and advice on the different types of gadgets available, a number of organisations can help. You can find contact details for all the organisations mentioned in this section in the Useful contacts section starting on page 10.

The **Disabled Living Foundation** operates a telephone and letter advice service on all types of disability equipment, clothing and footwear. It can suggest what equipment might best suit your needs, and give details of local suppliers. It also runs an online service for older and disabled people called ‘bathing made easy’. See its website: www.dlf.org.uk/bathing

The national research charity **Ricability** produces a range of independent consumer guides which provide practical information and advice for older and disabled people on choosing products and services. Topics covered by the guides include telephones, easier living in the home, buying or upgrading central

heating controls, community alarms, driving and car adaptations. Contact Ricability for a publications list or visit its website to download the guides.

If you would like to try out different types of equipment, you can visit a local **Disabled Living Centre**. There are lots of Disabled Living Centres around the UK where you can try out all sorts of equipment from simple gadgets to larger items of equipment such as wheelchairs. You can find your nearest Disabled Living Centre by contacting **Assist UK**, **Disability Wales** or **Disability Action in Northern Ireland**. There may also be a demonstration centre for disability equipment run by your local council or your hospital occupational therapy department.

For advice on the special equipment available if you have problems with your sight, contact the **Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)** and the **Partially Sighted Society**. You can also find more information on the help available for those with sight difficulties in our free advice leaflet, *Better Sight*.

RNID and **Hearing Concern** can both give you information on equipment for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. You can also find more information on hearing aids and other equipment in our free advice leaflet, *Better Hearing*.

If there is nothing at all available for your particular difficulty, two organisations which may be able to help are **REMAP** and **DEMAND** – charities that design and build special equipment to meet one-off needs. The equipment they make is given to the disabled person free of charge.

Getting help from your local council and the NHS

If you are experiencing difficulties at home and think that a particular piece of equipment or device would be useful, you should get in touch with your local social services department (England and Wales), social work department (Scotland) or health and social services trust (Northern Ireland). Ask for an assessment of your needs. Staff can arrange for an **occupational therapist** to visit you to look at the problems you are having.

The occupational therapist will help you find a solution by looking at different ways you can perform difficult tasks, and by suggesting the most suitable equipment for you. The occupational therapist will then usually arrange for the equipment you need to be provided. The equipment is not always free; usually a charge is made.

See our free advice leaflet, *Help in Your Home*, for information on getting an assessment and about the help that you can get in your home. The leaflet also looks at how to make a complaint if you don't think you're getting the help you need; or are having to wait a long time for equipment or adaptations.

If you would like further advice on getting help from your local council, call **SeniorLine** free on **0808 800 6565 (0808 808 7575 in Northern Ireland)**.

Mobility aids

If you need a walking stick or a walking frame, talk to your doctor, who will usually refer you to the physiotherapy or occupational therapy department of your local hospital. Always get advice from your doctor or physiotherapist about which aid is most suitable for you and on how to use it.

If you need a wheelchair, your doctor, physiotherapist or occupational therapist will refer you to your local NHS Wheelchair Service centre. The wheelchair will be free and fully maintained, although you may not be able to choose which chair you are given. If you would prefer to get the wheelchair of your choice, you may be offered an NHS voucher which you can use to pay for it. If the voucher is not enough to cover the cost, you will have to make up the difference yourself. If you are interested in buying a powered wheelchair, always check that the voucher will be valid. For more information on mobility aids see our free advice leaflet, *Keeping Mobile*.

Some mobility scooters will need to be registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you have a class 3 scooter or powered wheelchair (also called a class 3 invalid carriage), which is capable of exceeding speeds of 4mph but not more than 8mph, you will need to register it with the DVLA. Class 3 scooters are generally powered wheelchairs or outdoor vehicles, including scooters intended for use on roads. If you have one of these you will need to register it with the DVLA. They are licensed in the 'disabled' taxation class and display a nil-duty tax disc. You will not need to provide evidence of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) exemption and you will not need to pay the first registration fee. You are not required to display registration plates either. Class 2 scooters and powered wheelchairs, which cannot exceed 4mph and are only intended for use only on pathways, do not have to be registered.

You may want to think about getting insurance for your mobility aid. You are not legally required to have insurance for powered wheelchairs, scooters or buggies. But it could be a good idea to have at least public liability insurance,

which covers accidental damage to property and other people. You might also consider insurance which covers your equipment in the event of theft, fire or other damage. It might be possible to add your mobility aid to your home contents policy or arrange insurance through the manufacturer or another insurance company. If you buy a powered wheelchair or scooter privately, it may also be a good idea to take out warranty insurance which will cover the cost of repairs. Motability – a car scheme for disabled people – has both third party **and** warranty insurance plans for powered wheelchairs, scooters and buggies. For more information call 01264 333030.

You may only need a wheelchair or other mobility aid for a short period of time. If this is the case, the **British Red Cross** may be able to help you. It operates a medical loan service which can supply wheelchairs and other mobility aids on a temporary basis.

Home nursing equipment

This is a general term for items which are needed to help with certain medical conditions, such as continence pads, commodes and plastic sheets. Your district nurse will usually arrange the supply of this equipment. The equipment available on the NHS varies from one district to another and, depending on where you live, you may have to pay for certain items, such as continence pads. To find out whether you will be charged for continence pads speak to your local NHS specialist continence service. Call Continence Foundation on 0845 345 0165 to find out how to contact your local service.

If you need equipment such as a commode or bed pan only for a short period of time, it might be worth contacting the British Red Cross, which may be able to supply you with the equipment you need through its medical loan service.

Buying equipment privately

If your local social services department (social work department in Scotland; health and social services trust in Northern Ireland) can't supply the equipment you need, you may want to buy it privately. The **Disabled Living Foundation** can give you details of local suppliers.

Some disability equipment, especially larger and more expensive items, are sold by mail order or salespersons visiting your home. This can be very convenient, saving the trouble of visiting a showroom, but there have been cases of people

being pressured into buying equipment or being sold goods which are not the most appropriate for their needs.

Not only is disability equipment vital for your independence it can also be expensive, so think very carefully before signing a contract. Here are some things to think about before going ahead.

- **If possible, have a friend or carer with you when the salesperson calls.** It is good to have a second opinion and will make it more difficult for a salesperson to pressurise you; it also means that you will have a witness to any agreement you make.
- **The price of disability equipment can vary widely among different suppliers.** It is worth shopping around and checking prices with other suppliers before you commit to buying.
- **How comfortable is the equipment to use/is it appropriate for you?** Always try to get some independent advice on what type of aid would be best for you. If possible try out the equipment first. In some cases you may be able to have the equipment at home on trial.
- **Does the product comply with British Standards?** The equipment should have a BSI Kitemark or Safety Mark.
- **Will the equipment stand up to fairly hard wear and tear?** Find out how often the equipment will need servicing, and about running costs and guarantees. Decide whether you will need to insure your equipment and how much that will cost.
- **How easy will it be to transport and store the equipment?** If the piece of equipment is large you will need to check whether it will fit through your door and whether you will need a ramp to get it in and out. Other things to consider include whether the equipment can be folded up or will fit in a car or on the bus. If you have an electric wheelchair, you will need somewhere to store it and it will need to be regularly recharged. If you have an electric scooter you will need to make sure you have a lock for securing it when it is parked.

If you sign a contract with a salesperson you have invited into your home, but then change your mind or find out that the equipment does not suit you, you may not be able to cancel the contract without losing money. For more information on your rights when buying goods at home see our information sheet no. 19, *Buying Goods and Services at Home*.

Second-hand equipment

If you are buying second-hand equipment it is important to check that it is in good working order and is the right equipment to meet your needs. The seller must give you an accurate description of the equipment, including any faults, before you buy. It is best to get this in writing; this will make it easier for you to get your money back if you find any faults that you weren't told about. Make sure you are given the user manual and safety instructions.

If you want to buy or sell second-hand equipment contact the **Disability Equipment Register**.

Your local Disabled Living Centre or disability organisation may also know of second-hand equipment for sale in your area. Some companies buy and sell second-hand equipment, which may come with a limited guarantee.

Financial help

Many gadgets and aids, because of their simplicity, are relatively cheap to buy. However, some disability equipment can be expensive. If you can't afford to buy what you need, you may be able to get financial help.

Community Care Grants are available for people who want to stay in their own homes, rather than move into a care home or hospital. To apply, you must be receiving Pension Credit and have less than £1,000 in savings. You will be expected to use any savings over £1,000 to pay for whatever equipment you need. You can get an application form from your local benefits office. These are discretionary grants, so you can never be certain of getting one, but it's worth applying. Local advice agencies, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, might be able to help you make an application. More information is given in our free advice leaflet, *Can You Claim It?*

If you are not receiving Pension Credit, or you are refused a Community Care Grant, you may be able to get help from a **benevolent society**. Benevolent societies are charities that give grants to individuals. For more information about finding an appropriate benevolent society and making an application, see

our free information sheet no. 6, *Financial Help from Benevolent Societies*.

Adapting your home

Some people find that, even with equipment and aids, they still have difficulties living in their home. If you are in this situation you may need to think about making some adaptations to your home. Adaptations can range from simply installing a stairlift to making a home suitable for someone who uses a wheelchair. The **Disabled Living Foundation** and the **Centre for Accessible Environments** can give you advice on what adaptations might be possible. You might be able to get a grant from your local council to help with the costs.

For more information on making and paying for adaptations to your home, see our free information sheet no. 4, *Home Repairs and Improvements*.

Home improvement agencies

Home improvement agencies are set up to help older homeowners and private tenants organise adaptations, repairs and improvements to their homes. They are often called **Care and Repair** or **Staying Put** and can help you to decide what work you need to carry out to your home and give you advice on the financial help available. They can also assist with grant applications, and supervise any work that is carried out.

A Citizens Advice Bureau or the environmental health or housing department of your local council should be able to tell you if there is a home improvement agency in your area. Alternatively:

- if you live in **England** contact **Foundations** on 01457 891909
- if you live in **Wales** contact **Care and Repair Cymru** on 029 2057 6286
- if you live in **Scotland** contact **Care and Repair Forum Scotland** on 0141 221 9879
- if you live in **Northern Ireland** contact **Fold** on 028 9042 8314.

Useful contacts

Assist UK

Redbank House
4 St Chad's Street
Manchester M8 8QA
Tel: 0870 770 2866
Textphone: 0870 770 5813
Web: www.assist-uk.org

British Red Cross Society

UK Office, 44 Moorfields
London EC2Y 9AL
Tel: 0870 170 7000
Textphone: 020 7562 2050
Web: www.redcross.org.uk

To find your local British Red Cross branch look in your phone book.

Calibre Audio Library

New Road
Weston Turville
Aylesbury HP22 5XQ
Tel: 01296 432 339
Web: www.calibre.org.uk

Centre for Accessible Environments

70 South Lambeth Road
London SW8 1RL
Tel: 020 7840 0125
Web: www.cae.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau

Look in your phone book.

DEMAND

The Old Chapel
Mallard Road
Abbots Langley WD5 0GQ
Tel: 01923 681 800
Web: www.demand.org.uk

DIAL UK

St Catherine's, Tickhill Road
Doncaster DN4 8QN
Helpline (telephone and textphone): 01302 310123
Web: www.dialuk.org.info

DIAL provide information and advice to disabled people. Look in your phone book for your local branch.

Disability Action (Northern Ireland)

Portside Business Park
189 Airport Road West
Belfast BT3 9ED
Tel: 028 9029 7880
Textphone: 028 9029 7882
Web: www.disabilityaction.org

Disability Equipment Register

4 Chatterton Road
Yate
Bristol BS37 4BJ
Tel: 01454 318 818
Web: www.disabilityequipment.org.uk

Disability Wales

Bridge House
Caerphilly Business Park
Van Road
Caerphilly CF83 3GW
Tel and textphone: 029 2088 7325
Helpline: 0800 731 6282
Web: www.disabilitywales.org

Disabled Living Foundation

380–384 Harrow Road

London W9 2HU

Tel: 020 7289 6111

Helpline: 0845 130 9177

Textphone: 020 7432 8009

Web: www.dlf.org.uk

Hearing Concern

95 Gray's Inn Road

London WC1X 8TX

Helpline (telephone and textphone): 0845 0744 600

Web: www.hearingconcern.org.uk

National Talking Newspapers and Magazines

National Recording Centre

10 Browning Road

Heathfield

East Sussex TN21 8DB

Tel: 01435 866 102

Web: www.tnauk.org.uk

Partially Sighted Society

7–9 Bennetthorpe

Doncaster

South Yorkshire DN2 6AA

Tel: 0844 477 4966

REMAP

D9 Chaucer Business Park

Kemsing TN15 6YU

Tel: 0845 130 0456

Web: www.remap.org.uk

Ricability

30 Angel Gate

City Road

London EC1V 2PT

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Textphone: 020 7427 2469

Web: www.ricability.org.uk

RNID

19–23 Featherstone Street

London EC1Y 8SL

Helpline: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Web: www.rnid.org.uk

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street

London WC1H 9NE

Tel: 020 7388 1266

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Web: www.rnib.org.uk

RNIB Talking Book Service

PO Box 173

Peterborough PE2 6WS

Tel: 0845 762 6843

Web: www.rnib.org.uk

For further information contact:

Information Resources Team
Help the Aged
207–221 Pentonville Road
London N1 9UZ
Tel: 020 7278 1114

If you have access to the Internet you can download our advice leaflets and information sheets by logging on to **www.helptheaged.org.uk**

SeniorLine is the free welfare rights advice and information service run by Help the Aged for older people and their carers. Trained advice workers offer free, confidential and impartial advice about:

- welfare and disability benefits
- care at home
- residential care
- housing options and adaptations
- access to health and community services.

Freephone: **0808 800 6565**

Textphone: **0800 26 96 26**

9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday

If you are in **Northern Ireland**, contact **SeniorLine** on **0808 808 7575**.

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Help the Aged is a registered charity No. 272786, registered in England at the above address.