

Factsheet

Independent  
Living



The IET Benevolent Fund

Living independently in your own home is something that many of us take for granted. Some people find that a sudden disability or illness means that they have to adjust their entire way of life in one go. Yet for many, the effects of old age creep up gradually to the point that everyday living becomes a struggle.

A wide range of equipment and home adaptations is now available to help with everyday tasks, ranging from large pieces of specialist equipment to simple items. In this factsheet, we have outlined some of the equipment available and provided details of official and voluntary organisations which might be able to provide help and advice.

#### *Equipment*

If you or a relative are finding household tasks harder, it's worth investigating some of the devices on offer. Special equipment is available for all aspects of everyday living from adapted kitchen utensils to larger items like grab rails in the bathroom, stairlifts or walk in baths. Examples include:

- Spike boards to hold vegetables steady while you chop them
- Non slip mats to hold your plate still while you cut up your food
- Kettle and tea pot tippers to help pour hot drinks safely
- Button fasteners and zip pullers to help with getting dressed
- Dressing sticks to help pull on tights, trousers and socks without bending over
- Special chairs that can help push you forward and support you as you stand up
- Long handled window openers
- Special handles for plugs to take the strain of pulling them out of sockets.

As a start, visit the [Disabled Living Foundation's website](#) which provides a comprehensive range of factsheets outlining the various products available. It also provides an online questionnaire '[Ask Sara](#)', which will suggest various products and ideas for all aspects of daily life.

To get independent advice tailored to your individual situation and to view a selection of products, contact [Assist UK](#), which runs the UK wide network of Disabled Living Centres. You can visit your local centre to view products in person. The Research Institute for Consumer Affairs, [Ricability](#), also produces independent consumer guides aimed at disabled and older consumers.

The [RNIB](#) and [RNID](#) can provide advice on equipment and aids for those with problems with their sight and hearing.

If you have a particular difficulty and can't find equipment to help you, you may wish to contact [REMAP](#) or [DEMAND](#). Both organisations design and build one-off specialist equipment for free.

If you require financial support in order to purchase any sort of equipment, the first step is to contact your local authority social services department to arrange an assessment of your needs. [Help the Aged](#) provides a fact sheet offering useful advice on how to prepare for an assessment and how social services put together and fund such care packages. There is also more help and advice in IET Connect's 'Moving into a Care Home' fact sheet.

#### *Help in your home*

Help may be available with tasks such as:

- getting up and going to bed at night
- bathing and washing
- cleaning
- gardening
- shopping
- meals on wheels

Again, the best place to start will be with the social services department of your local authority. Some of these services are provided by voluntary organisations such as the WRVS although to access them you need to be referred via social services. Some are also provided by private agencies, and the care package put together by social services might include a combination of various different types of help.

#### *Adaptations to your home*

You may need to undertake more substantial work to your home, such as fitting a ramp, widening your doors or fitting a lift. Again, the best place to start is your local authority social services department. Help differs depending on where you live, but in England for example, local authorities have to provide minor adaptations (costing less than £1,000) if you have been assessed as needing them. Various grants may also be available.

There may be local agencies which can help to arrange adaptations. These are sometimes called 'Care and Repair' or 'Staying Put' and can help with identifying the work that needs to be done and finding suitable tradespeople to carry it out. Contact your local [Age Concern](#) or [Foundations](#), the national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies, for details of an organisation in your area.

The [Trustmark](#) scheme is a Government backed scheme to help find reliable tradespeople in your area.

#### *Quick Response Alarms*

You may want to consider an emergency alarm system so that you can summon help if you have an accident or a fall. The Disabled Living Foundation has a very useful factsheet entitled '[Choosing a Personal Alarm System](#)' which outlines the various options available.

#### *Safety*

Falls are a major cause of injury, loss of mobility and independence in older people. There are many things that you can do to lessen the chance of a fall. Make sure that your eyes have been tested recently and wear glasses if you need them. If your feet are painful, you are more likely to fall, so try to see a chiropodist.

Make sure that your kitchen, hallways and landings are well lit and consider painting the edge of steps with non-slip white paint. Fit handrails in areas where you need support and remove castors from furniture which you might lean on. Make sure there are no trailing wires, frayed carpets or rugs which might catch your feet. Your local [Age Concern](#) will be able to give you advice about local fall prevention schemes.

It is also worth thinking briefly about fire safety. Faulty electric blankets are a common cause of fire, so make sure you check your appliances to make sure they are in working order. Consider fitting smoke alarms too.

Help The Aged also offers [HandyVan](#), a home support service where trained fitters can install security equipment, change locks on doors and windows, and fit smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. They also offer a useful factsheet on [Bogus Callers](#), which offers advice and tips on what to do if you think a caller is not genuine.

### *Mobility*

It's important to get out and about if you can. If that's difficult, you may be able to apply for a Disabled Parking Badge or Blue Badge. Holders of the badge can park in restricted areas in some circumstances and are exempt from some charges. You may qualify if you receive the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance or have restricted mobility. The scheme is administered by the social services department of your local authority.

If you are interested in finding out about mobility aids such as wheelchairs or scooters, your first port of call should be your GP, who will usually refer you to a physiotherapist or the occupational therapy department of your local authority.

You may also be able to get reduced fares on buses, trains etc. In England, for example, local authorities have to offer free bus passes for off-peak travel to over 60s and those with a disability.

[Age Concern](#) also arranges social and leisure activities such as day centres and lunch clubs. Visit their website or phone them on 020 8765 7200 to find your local branch.

### *Sheltered or retirement housing*

Although you may wish to remain independent, you may appreciate a smaller, easier to manage home and value the security of having other people around who can help you if you need it.

In this case, you may wish to consider sheltered or retirement housing. This is self-contained accommodation which takes into account the needs of older people. It doesn't offer any personal or medical care as a care home would.

It normally comprises shared laundry facilities, a communal sitting room, a shared garden, a guest room for visitors, safety and security features, a 24hr emergency call system and a warden.

These schemes are either private developments or provided by your local council or housing association. Contact your local housing department in the first instance. Before entering into any arrangement, whether to purchase or rent, make sure you know exactly what you're buying and what's included in the service charge. Help the Aged has a good guide [here](#).

The Elderly Accommodation Counsel provides a free, independent, telephone advice service to older people, their families and people who work with them. The service aims to help older people make decisions about their housing, care or support in the full knowledge of what options are open to them, what they cost and how to get access to them. Call 020 7820 1343 or visit the [website](#).

[Counsel and Care](#) gives advice and support for families and their carers as well as an adviceline 0845 300 7585 (Local Call Rate)  
Mon - Fri, 10am-4pm except Wednesdays: 10am-1pm.

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This information is intended as a guide only. For advice on your specific situation, please phone our helpline. We will then put you in touch with our legal helpline which can provide individual advice on your particular situation.