



advice and support for older age

**Independent  
Age**

# Factsheet

## Choosing disability equipment

Disability equipment can help to keep you independent at home and in the community, whether you need a stairlift or scooter or just some helpful gadgets.

This factsheet explains some of the options that may be useful, things to consider when buying your equipment, and how the equipment may be funded.

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Independent Age provides advice to help people claim benefits, access social care and stay independent at home. Our local volunteers provide friendship visits and calls for lonely older people. To find out how Independent Age can help you, call us FREE on **0800 319 6789** or visit [www.independentage.org.uk](#). Our free wise guides and factsheets can be download from the website and ordered by phone or via our online order form.



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## **1. I think I could do with some help to stay independent – where should I start?**

Aids and equipment can help you stay independent and safe both at home and in the community. You may need a mobility scooter, a stairlift, or riser recliner chair, or something much smaller such as a gadget to open bottles and cans or a kettle tipper. Make sure you research and try the items out before you buy to see what would be best for you.

If you think you could benefit from some equipment or other help at home, start by requesting a free assessment from your local council social services. Their contact details will be in the local phone directory or on the council's website.

The assessment will usually take place at your home and may involve an occupational therapist, social worker, or care manager, depending on the sort of help you may need. The person assessing you may look at what tasks you can and can't do at home, as well as what tasks you find difficult. It might help to jot down anything you struggle with or feel unsafe doing over a few weeks. If you have good days and bad days, try to describe one of your bad days so the assessor knows how difficult things can be for you.

Talk to the assessor about what you think might help you. Following the assessment, they may write you a care plan showing what help you might benefit from.

## Good to know



Get an assessment even if you will be buying equipment privately. It's a good way to find out about different products and get advice on what would be best for you from an occupational therapist. They can also give you tips and show you how to do tasks without expensive equipment. This might save you time and money in the long run.

## What help might I get?

The care plan that is drawn up as a result of your assessment may suggest different types of help at home. It may suggest you could benefit from:

Home carers or a personal assistant to help with personal care such as getting in and out of bed, bathing or preparing meals. Find out more in our factsheet *Help at home: what may be available in your local area* (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

Equipment or adaptations costing less than £1,000, depending on what may be available in your local council area. This might include a bath seat, handrails, bed raising blocks or a perching stool, for example. Your local council will provide these free of charge if you're assessed as needing them. Your council may not offer very small aids, such as kettle tippers, tap turners, and dressing aids, so you will need to buy them yourself. See page 6 for more about small aids.

Home adaptations costing more than £1,000. This could be for installing equipment like a stairlift or converting your

bathroom to a wet room. You may get financial help from your council to help pay for this (see page 28). Our factsheet *Adapting your home to stay independent* has more information (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

Telecare or telehealth, which is technology to help you live safely at home. It includes community alarms, sensors that can detect when you've left a tap running or left the gas on, medication dispensers with alerts to remind you to take your medication and ways to monitor your health at home. See our factsheet *Telecare and telehealth: what it is and how to get it* (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

Whether or not you have to contribute to the costs of care at home depends on your income and savings. Our factsheet *Assessment and services from our local council in England* has more information (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

### **Helpful equipment at home**

If your care plan suggests you need small aids or equipment at home – or you've seen an occupational therapist privately who has suggested this – then turn to the relevant section in this factsheet to find out more about the item you're thinking of getting. You can discover more about what it is, how it could help, how much it might cost and how to choose the right equipment for you.

## **2. Small aids for daily living**

Your council may not offer very small aids, such as kettle tippers, adapted cutlery, tap turners, and dressing aids, so you will need to buy them yourself. These aids are fairly cheap but can make a big difference when doing tasks that now seem difficult (if not impossible) without help. For example, if you find it difficult to reach or bend a sock or stocking aid costs less than £2, and can help you get dressed. The Disabled Living Foundation (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk) and [asksara.dlf.org.uk](http://asksara.dlf.org.uk)) has information on small aids and where to buy them.

### **3. Buying a mobility scooter**

A mobility scooter can let you travel independently if you have mobility problems. Scooters are battery powered and come in many different models and sizes.

Scooters are divided into class 2 and class 3 vehicles depending on where they're going to be driven. Class 2 scooters can only be used on pavements and have a top speed of 4mph. Class 3 scooters can be used on the road and go up to 8mph. They tend to be larger, more robust and have safety features like mirrors and a horn. To use a class 3 scooter on the pavement, it must be able to travel more slowly, at 4mph.

#### **Is a scooter right for me?**

A scooter can give you back your freedom and independence and help you feel part of your community again. You can use one to visit friends and family who live nearby or get to the local shops on your own. However, they're not suitable for everyone. You'll need to be able to get on and off it by yourself. And while there isn't a legal requirement about your eyesight, the government recommends you only ride one if you can read a car's registration plate from 40 feet (12.5 metres) away. It's your responsibility to make sure you can ride safely.

Think about what size and type of scooter you need. The smaller it is, the easier it will be to use indoors and store. Smaller (class 2) scooters can be folded up or dismantled to fit in a car boot, so may be best if you're planning to take your scooter on trips and holidays. Some smaller scooters can also be taken on buses – contact your local bus

company to find out more. If you want a scooter to travel longer distances, look for a larger (class 3) scooter. These scooters need to be registered with the DVLA. This is free and you don't need a driving licence.

Whichever model you go for, make sure you have space to store and charge your scooter indoors. You can buy outdoor scooter stores that have charging points, but these are expensive and not suitable for every home.

While most retailers will provide basic training on how to use your scooter, it's a good idea to have additional training to use your scooter safely. Some local Mobility Centres offer training, and some police forces offer free road awareness courses - check what is available in your area.

You'll need to keep your mobility scooter maintained and get it serviced regularly, and you may need accessories to keep you comfortable and safe such as wing mirrors, padded arm rests or a bad weather canopy. Bear this in mind when thinking about the cost. Ask the provider if they offer a warranty or service contract. What would happen if the scooter stopped working - would you have to pay for repairs? Would the provider lend you another scooter in the meantime?



## Good to know



Shopmobility is a scheme that hires out mobility aids to people who need help accessing city centres and shopping areas. Each scheme offers a range of equipment for hire, including scooters and electric wheelchairs, as well as training on how to safely use it. Anyone with limited mobility can become a member – you don't have to be registered disabled or receive a disability benefit. There is usually a small fee to join and hire costs are low or even free. To find a Shopmobility scheme near you, call 01933 229644 or visit [nfsuk.org](http://nfsuk.org).

### How much will a scooter cost?

If you receive certain disability benefits, you may be eligible to hire or buy a scooter through the Motability scheme. See page 28 for details.

If you're not eligible for Motability, you can rent or buy privately. Rental costs range from £12 to over £45 a week. Scooters range in price from £400 up to £5,000 for a top-of-the-range class 3 scooter for the road.

While it's not a legal requirement to have insurance for your scooter, it's a good idea to take out a policy to cover any accidents, theft or damage. This will mean you're covered if you injure anyone or damage their property with your scooter. Contact the Disabled Living Foundation for details of insurance companies (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk/content/insurance](http://dlf.org.uk/content/insurance)).

## Other options

If a mobility scooter isn't suitable for you, perhaps because you're not safe to drive one or simply don't have the space to keep it, there may be other options. Talk to your occupational therapist or physiotherapist, if you have one.

Some of the alternative options may be:

- a walking aid with or without a seat attachment
- a manual or electric wheelchair
- pre-bookable accessible transport schemes such as Dial-a-Ride or community cars - contact your council to find out what's available in your area
- your local Taxicard scheme for subsidised taxi fares - contact your council for more information
- borrowing a mobility aid from Shopmobility (01933 229644, [nfsuk.org](http://nfsuk.org)) including scooters and electric wheelchairs, to help you get around in shopping areas
- getting help from the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) (0845 608 0122, [royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](http://royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)) which provides a range of services for older people to help them get out and about and engage in social activities.

## To do



Rica (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs, an organisation conducting consumer research for older and disabled people) produces a guide called Stepping out which looks at all mobility aids, including scooters and wheelchairs. Download it free from their website at [rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk) or phone them on 020 7427 2460 to order a printed copy (you'll need to pay for postage).

## **4. Buying an electric wheelchair**

An electric wheelchair (also known as a powerchair or powered wheelchair) can help you get around independently if you find it hard to push yourself in a manual wheelchair or need to travel long distances in the chair.

### **Is an electric wheelchair right for me?**

Start by discussing this as an option with your doctor, consultant or occupational therapist. If they think you would meet the criteria for the local NHS wheelchair service, they can refer you for an assessment.

Each local wheelchair service has its own criteria to decide who is eligible for help, but generally you won't be given one if you can walk even a little, can use a manual wheelchair, can't control an electric wheelchair, or only want to use it outdoors. If you're eligible you'll either be loaned a wheelchair or given a voucher towards the cost of one. If not, you'll have to hire or buy one privately.

Electric wheelchairs are designed either for indoor use only or for both indoor and outdoor use. Make sure it's the right size to use around your home, although you may be able to adapt your home if necessary. Wheelchairs for outdoor use tend to be more robust and have batteries that can cover a longer distance. You can get models with kerb-climbing abilities if you need this to get around your local area.

Like mobility scooters, outdoor wheelchairs come in two categories: class 2 and class 3. If you plan to use your wheelchair on the road, you'll need a class 3 wheelchair.

These can be used on the pavement at up to 4mph or on the road at up to 8mph. They tend to be larger and need safety features like indicators and a horn. Class 2 wheelchairs can only be used on the pavement. All electric wheelchairs are powered by a rechargeable battery, so you will need a suitable place to store and charge yours.

Electric wheelchairs are usually controlled with a joystick and control panel on the arm rest, but there are alternatives if you can't use a hand controller. They come in a range of models with various accessories, including pressure relief cushions and head and side supports. If you can't get in and out of the chair independently, there are aids and equipment to help you do this, such as transfer boards or hoists. Talk to your occupational therapist about what would be best for you. Electric wheelchairs are designed for different weight capacities, and can be custom-made if you find traditional models don't suit you.

If you want to travel with your wheelchair, some models can be dismantled or folded up to fit in your car. Heavier models may need a ramp or hoist to get the wheelchair into the boot or on the roof. Rica produces a factsheet called Getting a wheelchair into a car for more information. Download it free from their website at [rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk) or phone them on 020 7427 2460 to order a printed copy (you'll need to pay for postage).

The wheelchair will need to be serviced regularly to stay in good working order. The manufacturer may offer a warranty, maintenance contract or insurance policy to cover the cost of servicing, engineer call-outs and replacing faulty

parts. This cover may not include replacement batteries, so read the small print carefully to know what you may be asked to pay for.

### **How much will an electric wheelchair cost?**

If you receive certain disability benefits, you may be eligible to hire or buy an electric wheelchair through the Motability Scheme. See page 28 for details.

If you're not eligible for Motability, you can privately rent or buy your own electric wheelchair. Rental costs range from £20 to over £55 a week. Prices to buy start from £300 and can go up to over £40,000 for a specialist chair. Check whether the price includes features such as the battery and charger. Ask about the cost of replacement batteries and maintenance as they can be expensive.

### **Other options**

If an electric wheelchair isn't suitable, there may be other options. If you have an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, ask them for advice. If you can travel independently, consider whether a mobility scooter would suit you (see page 7). If you have someone to push you or you can propel yourself, a manual wheelchair may be suitable. If you can walk but find it difficult, consider whether a walking aid such as a frame or trolley would help. Visit the Disabled Living Foundation website at [dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk) for further information.

## To do



Rica produces a guide called Getting a powered wheelchair. Download it free from their website at [rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk) or phone them on 020 7427 2460 to order a printed copy (you'll need to pay for postage).

## **5. Buying a stairlift**

A stairlift can help you if you have difficulty walking up and down your stairs. It conveys you up and down a track on your stairs, usually in a seated position (but can be in a standing position). If you use a wheelchair, there are stairlifts available with wheelchair platforms. Stairlifts are operated by controls on the armrest or by remote control, and they charge themselves up automatically. They are battery powered, so they'll work even during a power cut.

### **Is a stairlift right for me?**

A stairlift can let you move comfortably around your home without help and is much easier and cheaper to install than a through-floor lift or a downstairs bathroom. Modern stairlifts may be compact enough for narrow or steep staircases and can sometimes be installed on curved walls or unusually shaped staircases. Straight-track lifts can be very quick to install (usually in a few hours), need no major building work and have very low running costs.

If you have a condition which may increasingly affect your mobility, think carefully about whether a stairlift is the best solution for you. Will you be able to easily and safely use the stairlift in future? Some stairways aren't safe or suitable for a stairlift, so get advice from an occupational therapist (see page 3) or the assessor from the stairlift company first if you want to install one privately.

Stairlifts usually have a weight limit of around 25 to 30 stone, and you'll need to be able to transfer yourself onto it and work the controls. If you get a standing lift, you'll need to be able to stand safely and not be prone to dizzy spells.

Most stairlifts have two remote controls so you can call the lift or send it back up or down the stairs.

If you rent your home privately, ask the landlord before getting a stairlift. Stairlifts don't usually count as structural alterations as they're fixed to the stairs rather than the wall. Your landlord may ask you to pay for it to be removed if you move out. If you rent from the council, contact them for information – it's likely they will have to arrange the installation for you. If you live with other people, think about whether a stairlift will affect their use of the stairs.

Your stairlift will need to be serviced regularly to stay in good working order. The manufacturer may offer a warranty, maintenance contract or insurance policy to cover the cost of servicing, engineer call-outs, and replacing faulty parts. This cover may not include replacement batteries, so read the small print carefully to know what you may be asked to pay for.

### **How much will my stairlift cost?**

Prices for a straight stairlift start from approximately £2,500. A complex custom-made stairlift could be more than double this. Rental installation costs range from £350 to over £1,000 (this may also include removal costs). You will also have to pay a rental fee, which could range from £10 a month for a straight stairlift to over £150 a month for a more complicated model. If you've had a community care assessment (see page 3) and it recommended that you need a stairlift, you may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant to help with the cost (see page 28). Or if you rent your home from the council or housing association, speak



to your housing officer – they may provide the stairlift directly.

### **Other options**

If a stairlift isn't suitable for you or your home, consider your other options. If you can't safely access your upstairs rooms, could you turn a ground-floor room into a bathroom? Or could a downstairs room be converted into your bedroom? For further information, see our factsheet *Adapting your home to stay independent* (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

Another option may be moving to more accessible accommodation. This could be a bungalow, or sheltered or retirement accommodation. For further information see our factsheet *Housing options in later life* (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

## 6. Buying a riser recliner chair

Riser recliner chairs are designed to help you sit down and stand up more easily, with a reclining action to make you more comfortable. Pressing a button makes the chair slowly rise up so you can stand safely. To sit, you position yourself on the raised seat and press the button to make the chair go down. Most chairs are electrically operated (i.e they work off the mains through an electric plug) but some come with a manual lever. Electrical chairs have a battery back-up system in case of a power cut.

Riser recliner chairs come in varying sizes with different movement options. You can add accessories for additional comfort and safety, such as back rests and memory foam cushions. If you use a wheelchair, some riser recliner chairs have drop or removable armrests to help you transfer into them.

### Good to know



Even if your riser recliner chair fully reclines, it isn't designed to replace a bed. Talk to an occupational therapist or physiotherapist about whether a chair-bed or specialist multi-adjustable bed would be more suitable for you if you plan to sleep in it overnight.

## **Is a riser recliner chair right for me?**

Riser recliner chairs let you get your feet up or lie back for a rest. They make it easy to change your position, which can stop you getting uncomfortable.

You can get chairs with additional features to suit your needs. For example:

- a rising leg rest can help with swollen ankles or medical conditions that affect your legs
- pressure-relieving cushions can keep your joints mobile and prevent you getting pressure sores
- a 'tilt in space' action means the whole chair tips back, not just the back rest. This gives your lower back more support and doesn't rub the skin on your back as you move
- if there's a risk that small children or pets could get trapped in the mechanism as you lower the chair, look for one with a safety device to prevent this.

Riser recliner chairs are larger and heavier than normal chairs and can take up a lot of room. Think about where you want to position it: is there enough space for you to fully recline and raise the leg rest? If you're short on space, a compact 'wall hugging' chair can be positioned closer to a wall.

## **How much will my riser recliner chair cost?**

Prices range from £350 to £7,000, depending on whether you need special features. You can generally buy a riser recliner chair off the peg, but if you're very small or very large you may need a custom-made one. This will be more expensive.

If you've had a community care assessment (see page 3) which recommended that you need a riser recliner chair to stay independent at home, you may receive one from the council as a long-term loan, or you may be eligible for funding to buy your own. If you're paying for the chair yourself, see page 28 to find out about possible sources of funding.

If you're buying a simple riser recliner chair, you should be able to work out for yourself whether it's suitable or not. If you need special features, get an assessment from your local social services department to work out what you need.

Try out the chair before you buy it to make sure it's comfortable and easy to use, and that you can operate the controls properly. Be prepared to try the chair for at least an hour – bring a book or something to do! It's easiest to do this if the provider offers home visits.

Ask the provider if they offer a warranty for the chair. Check what would happen if the chair stopped working – would you have to pay for repairs? Would they lend you another chair while yours was being repaired? Ask what the cooling-off period is, in case you decide the chair isn't right for you.

It's possible to buy a second-hand riser recliner chair privately, but follow the same steps as if you were buying new to make sure it's right for you.

## Other options

If a riser recliner chair isn't suitable, there may be other options. If you have an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, ask them for advice on standing and sitting in the right way. They may have simple tips that can help you.

Higher seats make it easier to sit down and stand up. You can buy a chair with a higher seat or raise the height of a chair by putting chair-raising blocks under the legs. Chairs with arms can help you push up and lower yourself with more control. High backs or contoured backs can help your posture. If you need to raise your legs, you can get a leg rest or foot stool.

### To do



Rica produces a guide called *Are you sitting comfortably?* A guide to riser recliner chairs, which also looks at choosing a standard chair. Download it free from their website at [rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk) or phone them on 020 7427 2460 to order a printed copy (you'll need to pay for postage).

## **7. Buying an adjustable bed**

Adjustable beds (also called electric beds or profiling beds) can help you sleep better by letting you rest more comfortably. They can help you get in and out of bed and move into a more comfortable sleeping position. Basic models can raise and lower the upper body, while more complex beds can move into multiple positions. Most adjustable beds are electric (i.e they work off the mains through an electric plug) and are controlled by a handset.

### **Is an adjustable bed right for me?**

Adjustable beds can help with a range of health conditions, including arthritis, and respiratory and circulatory problems.

As with ordinary beds, adjustable beds are available in various sizes. They also come as 'dual double beds' – a double bed base with two separate mechanisms so each side moves independently. If you share a bed, this means your partner won't be disturbed by your movements and each of you can choose a comfortable sleeping position. As with riser recliner chairs, some beds offer a 'wall hugger' feature that glides the mattress back towards the wall as it rises up, so your bedside table remains within reach.

You can get additional features such as handrails, bed rails and heat pads. Many models have a safety mechanism that will sense an obstruction and stop the bed moving – useful if you have pets or small children around.

Adjustable beds can be expensive, especially when you factor in the cost of a special mattress that can bend with the base of the bed. The bed will need to be connected to

an electrical supply and won't work in a power cut unless you have battery back-up. Consider where you want to position the bed, as they can be bulky and heavy to move.

### **How much will my adjustable bed cost?**

Average prices for a bed and mattress range from £400 to £1,600 for a single bed, and from £1,200 to £2,400 for a dual double bed. They may cost more if you need special features. If you want a custom-made bed – for example, to fit an awkward sized room – this will be more expensive.

You can buy an adjustable bed from the high street or from specialist shops, which will usually have a wider range with more features. Check that the shop has the National Bed Federation mark of approval. Manufacturers belonging to this scheme have to meet certain standards and sign up to a code of practice.

Try out the bed before you buy it, to make sure it's comfortable and easy to use, and that you can operate the controls. Bed showrooms should have several models on display, so take your time and try several of them. Take a family member or a friend with you, as it's always good to have someone else's opinion. Companies can also visit you at home if you have problems getting to a showroom.

Ask the provider if they offer a warranty or service plan for the bed. Check what would happen if the bed stopped working – would you have to pay for repairs? Would they lend you another bed while yours was being repaired? Ask what the cooling-off period is, in case you decide the bed isn't right for you.

It's possible to buy a second-hand bed privately, but follow the same steps as if you were buying new to make sure it's right for you.

### **Other options**

If an adjustable bed isn't suitable, there may be other options. Raising the height of your bed with bed-raisers can help you get in and out of bed. Back rests, inclinators (electric devices which raise part of a mattress) and mattress wedges can raise your upper body or legs while you rest. If you have trouble turning, sitting up or moving, then rails, grab handles and lifting poles (a pole with a strap and handle to help you pull yourself into position) can be fitted to an ordinary bed. If you need to be regularly turned in bed, mattress turners can be used with a standard bed and mattress. Visit the website [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk) to find out more.



## **8. Before you buy**

### **Should I buy or rent the equipment?**

If you only need the equipment temporarily or you would like to try out different models, consider renting rather than buying. If you're renting from a private firm, check the terms and conditions. Consider whether you have to pay for the item to be serviced or insured, or whether this is included in the rental charge. Do you have to pay a deposit, or pay a delivery or collection fee?

### **Try before you buy**

Trying out equipment before you buy it is a good idea. There are different ways to try it, depending on what you're buying.

- Disabled Living Centres – find your nearest centre in local directories or contact your local council for details
- The Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) runs the longest standing equipment demonstration centre, and is based in south-west London. The centre contains many items of equipment for all areas of daily living for visitors to try free of charge. Visiting is by appointment only, so contact the centre to arrange a time convenient for you (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk))
- The Disabled Living Foundation offers a free short-term loan service of small electronic aids, such as magnifiers, memory prompts, and safety alarms (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk)).
- Equipment exhibitions such as Naidex (0203 033 2500, [naidex.co.uk](http://naidex.co.uk)) have suppliers demonstrating and providing advice about disability products.

- Motability has events throughout the country, where you can try out scooters, electric wheelchairs, adapted cars and more (0300 456 4566, [motability.co.uk](http://motability.co.uk)).
- In some parts of the country the Red Cross lends wheelchairs and other equipment, such as walking frames and back rests, in return for a donation (0844 871 1111, [redcross.org.uk](http://redcross.org.uk)).
- Shopmobility lends electric wheelchairs, manual wheelchairs and scooters for use in shops and leisure facilities. Some local schemes are free, while others have a small fee (01933 229644, [nfsuk.org](http://nfsuk.org)).

### **Reviews from consumer organisations**

Before choosing your equipment, compare prices and read consumer reports from organisations such as:

- the Disabled Living Foundation – 0300 999 0004  
[livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)
- Which? – [which.co.uk](http://which.co.uk)
- Rica (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs) – 020 7427 2460, [rica.org.uk](http://rica.org.uk)

### **Good to know**



Try to get at least three quotes to compare prices before making a purchase. Find out if the price includes any extras such as maintenance and aftercare. If you're buying online, remember you won't be able to try the equipment first and you may have to assemble it yourself.

## **9. General things to consider, whatever you're buying**

As with any item, you want the best product at the best price, but you also need it to be reliable and remain in good working order. When considering aids and equipment, consider the following:

- Does the company you are looking to buy from offer a guarantee and after-sales service?
- Will you need to buy insurance or a warranty, or if this is included in the retail price? What does it cover?
- Will the product need servicing? Who will need to do this and where, and how much will it cost?
- If your item needs spare parts, are they affordable, and how quickly could you get them?
- If the equipment stops working and you need to call out an engineer, how much would this cost?
- What's the returns policy if the item is faulty?
- If you have to order the item, is there a cooling-off or cancellation period in case you change your mind?
- Have you calculated the running costs, and the costs of any accessories you will need to buy?

For additional safety, check that the equipment complies with British Standards and displays the Kitemark. This shows that it's been tested and approved by the British Standards Institute (BSI).

## **10. How to pay for your equipment**

Disability equipment can be expensive, but there may be money available to help you pay for it.

### **Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)**

If you're disabled and need essential work done on your home to live independently, you may qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from your local council. This could cover a stairlift, for example. You could be awarded up to £30,000 (in England) although the amount you get depends on your income and savings. Both homeowners and tenants can apply for a DFG, but if you're a tenant you must get written consent for the work to be done. Landlords can also apply on behalf of a disabled tenant.

See our factsheet *Adapting your home to stay independent* to find out more (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

### **Motability**

If you receive certain disability benefits, you can apply to the Motability Scheme to hire or buy an electric wheelchair, scooter or car. You'll need to be receiving one of the following:

- higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance
- enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement.

If you're eligible, you can exchange part of your allowance for suitable mobility equipment. The agreement covers

insurance, maintenance and breakdown cover. Your payment is given directly to Motability. Contact Motability for more information (0300 456 4566, [motability.co.uk](http://motability.co.uk)).

### **Grants and loans**

Some charities will help with the cost of aids and equipment. Grants are usually only considered for equipment that is not provided by the council or the NHS. Charities will consider applications based on your individual circumstances: see our factsheet Grants from charities for people on a low income (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org))

For help finding grants and other financial support, contact Turn2us (0808 802 2000, [turn2us.org.uk](http://turn2us.org.uk)) or Charity Search (0117 982 4060, [charitysearch.org.uk](http://charitysearch.org.uk)) for help finding grants and other financial support. Charities for specific conditions or illnesses may give grants or help you apply for funding – consider organisations like Macmillan Cancer Support or the MS Society, for example. Mobility Centres, Disabled Living Centres and local advice services may also be able to help you apply.

### **'Buy now, pay later' - deals from the supplier**

Some suppliers offer financial or hire purchase deals, or deals to spread the cost. However, check the small print – some of these deals can work out very expensive. Consider whether it's your best option.

## **11. Buying second-hand – what to consider**

Buying second-hand can be cheaper, but choice may be limited. Consider what your requirements are – although the equipment may be cheaper, if it doesn't do what you need it to do, it's not worth buying. Check that the item is in good working order and safe to use.

Some equipment suppliers recondition second-hand items such as stairlifts. Others sell ex-demonstration models which work as new, but may be slightly marked or dusty from being on display. Guarantees or warranties on these items are usually limited (for example, three or six months) so check with the supplier. Buying second-hand from a supplier can be more expensive than buying from an individual, but the equipment should be in good working order and you should have more guarantee against faulty equipment.

### **To do**



See the Disabled Living Foundation's webpage on where to find second-hand equipment at [dlf.org.uk](http://dlf.org.uk)

## **12. I don't need my equipment any more. What should I do with it?**

If your equipment was provided by your council, NHS service or a charity, contact them to see if they will come and collect the item. Check if there is any charge for this.

If you bought the equipment yourself, some suppliers offer a buy back or recycling service. This is usually only for items which can be reconditioned and sold on, so may not be available for custom-made equipment. The supplier may charge a collection fee.

If you own a mobility scooter and want a newer model, consider part-exchange. Not only will they reuse your old one, you'll get some cash towards your new one.

Some organisations specialise in recycling equipment: see [disabreg.co.uk](http://disabreg.co.uk) or [disabledgear.com](http://disabledgear.com). Others will recondition and re-sell second-hand equipment and give a percentage to charity.

A local voluntary support group may know of someone in need of the equipment. Alternatively you can sell equipment privately, by putting ads on local message boards in shops and community centres, or using websites such as eBay or Gumtree. Be careful about giving out your personal details – keep yourself safe. Action Fraud (0300 123 2040, [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk)) provides advice about how to keep yourself safe when buying and selling online.

## To do



Which? has information about buying and selling on eBay, which includes their top tips to help keep you safe while buying and selling. Visit

[which.co.uk/technology/computing/guides/selling-goods-safely-on-ebay](http://which.co.uk/technology/computing/guides/selling-goods-safely-on-ebay) to find out more.



### **13. Making a complaint**

If you have a complaint about your local council – for example, if you've had to wait a long time for an assessment or for your equipment to be provided, try to resolve it first with an informal chat. If this doesn't resolve things, ask the council for their complaints procedure to make a formal written complaint. If you're still unhappy with the council's response, you can ask the local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to investigate your complaint further (0300 061 0614, [lgo.org.uk](http://lgo.org.uk)). See our factsheet Complaints about council and health services for more information (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org))

If you have a complaint about the NHS – for example, about the NHS wheelchair service – try to resolve it informally first before making a formal complaint. You can also complain directly to NHS England (0300 311 22 33, [england.nhs.uk](http://england.nhs.uk)). If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you can contact the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (0345 015 4033, [ombudsman.org.uk](http://ombudsman.org.uk)). The NHS Choices website has more information on making a complaint at [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk).

Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can provide advice and support with your complaint. PALS can also arrange an independent advocate for you if necessary, from the local NHS Complaints Advocacy service. Details of your local PALS are available from your local library, GP surgery, dentist surgery, or your local hospital.

If you have a complaint about a private supplier, you're protected by your consumer rights under the law. If the equipment is faulty, get in touch with the supplier as soon as possible. They may exchange the item for a new one or offer to repair it. If this doesn't work, ask to speak to the manager or put your complaint in writing to the supplier. Contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (03454 04 05 06, [citizensadvice.org.uk](http://citizensadvice.org.uk)) for advice. They may refer your complaint to Trading Standards for further investigation. If the supplier is a member of the British Healthcare Trades Association (020 7702 2124, [bhta.net](http://bhta.net)), you can complain directly to them.

### **To do**



The Which? website offers a range of information on consumer issues, including template letters to help you make a complaint:

[which.co.uk/consumer-rights/action/make-a-complaint](http://which.co.uk/consumer-rights/action/make-a-complaint).

This factsheet has been put together by Independent Age's expert advisers. It is not a full explanation of the law and is aimed at people aged over 60.

If you need this information in an alternative format (such as large-print or audio cd), call us on 0800 319 6789 or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

### **Tell us what you think**

We'd love to hear what you think of our publications. Please write to us at the address below, phone us on 020 7605 4294 or email [advice@independentage.org](mailto:advice@independentage.org).

We will use your feedback to help us plan for changes to our publications in the future. Thank you.

### **Supporting Independent Age**

If you have found this information helpful and would like to support our work, there are lots of ways you can help:


- get fit - run, walk or cycle in aid of Independent Age
- take part in our annual raffle
- donate in memory of a loved one
- remember Independent Age in your will and benefit from our Free Wills offer to supporters.

If you would like to donate or raise money in aid of Independent Age, please visit our website, email [supporters@independentage.org](mailto:supporters@independentage.org) or call our fundraising team on 020 7605 4288.



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