



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, a scooter or just some helpful gadgets.

This factsheet explains some of the options, things to consider when buying your equipment, and help you might get to pay for it.

Call FREE on **0800 319 6789** Visit **[www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)**

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## **About Independent Age**

Whatever happens as we get older, we all want to remain independent and live life on our own terms. That's why, as well as offering regular friendly contact and a strong campaigning voice, Independent Age can provide you and your family with clear, free and impartial advice on the issues that matter: care and support, money and benefits, health and mobility.

A charity founded over 150 years ago,  
we're independent so you can be.

The information in this factsheet applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru  
(0800 022 3444, [agecymru.org.uk](http://agecymru.org.uk))  
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland  
(0800 12 44 222, [agescotland.org.uk](http://agescotland.org.uk)).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI  
(0808 808 7575, [ageni.org](http://ageni.org)).

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# 1. What equipment is available to help me stay independent?

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, a riser recliner chair, or something much smaller, such as a gadget to open bottles and cans or a kettle tipper. Make sure you do your research and try the items out before you buy to see what would be best for you.

## Working out what you need

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

Don't be put off by the idea of an assessment – it's an opportunity to discuss your needs and any difficulties you have. You should be in the driving seat and the assessor will listen to your opinions and wishes. You can ask for the assessment to take place at your home. You can also ask for an occupational therapist to be involved. An occupational therapist works with people who are ill, recovering from an illness, have health problems or have a disability. They'll use the assessment to identify what tasks you can do, what you have difficulty with and what you're unable to do.

It might help to jot down anything you struggle with or feel unsafe doing over a few weeks, so you remember to mention them during your assessment. If you have good days and bad days, explain this so the assessor knows how difficult things can be for you.

## Good to know



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

## What help might I get?

After your care needs assessment, as a minimum you'll be given a copy of your assessment and information about where to find the help you need.

If your needs are high enough, the council will have to meet them. In that case, you'll be given a separate financial assessment to work out whether you'll have to pay for any of the services the council provides.

If you only need equipment, or minor adaptations costing less than £1,000, which the council is paying for, you will not need to have a financial assessment. Whether or not you have to contribute to other costs of care at home depends on your income and savings, which is worked out in the financial assessment. Our factsheet **Assessment and services from your local council** has more information ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

If your needs are high enough to qualify for council help and the council will be paying for some of this help, a care and support plan will be drawn up, describing how your needs will be met. The help or equipment that's suggested will depend on your individual needs.

The assessment 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](tel:08003196789), [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

**Equipment, or adaptations costing less than £1,000**

such as a bath seat, handrails, bed raising blocks or a perching stool. 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. However, you should still be advised if any small aids might help you. See chapter 2 for more about small aids.

**Home adaptations costing more than £1,000**

for instance, widening doorways to allow space for a wheelchair or converting your bathroom to a wet room. You may get help from your council to pay for this (see chapter 13. Our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** has more information ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), [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 **Technology to help you at home** ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

## 2. Small aids for daily living

Small daily living aids can help you with specific things you find difficult, like gripping, lifting or turning things. For example:

- kettle tippers to help you fill or pour from a kettle
- adapted cutlery if you have a weaker grip or limited hand movement
- turners to help you use taps, turn keys or undo jars
- elastic shoe laces to convert lace-up shoes into slip-ons for people who struggle to tie their shoes
- mounted or long-reach nail clippers.

Your council may not offer very small aids, in which case you'll need to buy them yourself. These aids are fairly cheap but can make a big difference when carrying out 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 can cost as little as £5 and can help you get dressed. The Disabled Living Foundation ([0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004), [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. Help to get around

If you have long-term mobility issues, there are various options that could help you to get around independently. Depending on your needs, mobility scooters, wheelchairs or walking aids could be right for you. A wide range of equipment is available, so look into the different options carefully – the following chapters explore a few of them.

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, walking frames and wheelchairs. The guide includes a checklist of questions to ask before choosing a piece of walking equipment. Download it from

[rica.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pdfs/mobility/wheeled-walking-frames.pdf](http://rica.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/pdfs/mobility/wheeled-walking-frames.pdf) or phone them on 020 7427 2460 to order a printed copy (you'll need to pay for postage).

### Getting around the shops

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 use it safely. 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).

## 4. Mobility scooters

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.

### **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 12.3 metres (40 feet) away. It's your responsibility to make sure you can ride safely.

### **Types of scooter**

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, front and rear lights and a horn. To use a class 3 scooter on the pavement, it must be able to travel more slowly, at 4mph.

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 make sure you're using 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 maintain your mobility scooter 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?

## **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 chapter 13 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, [livingmadeeasy.org.uk/mobilityandwalking/insurance-and-finance-schemes-for-powered-wheelchairs-and-scooters-2150-p/](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk/mobilityandwalking/insurance-and-finance-schemes-for-powered-wheelchairs-and-scooters-2150-p/)).

## Other options

If a mobility scooter isn't suitable for you, perhaps because you can't safely 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 are described in this chapter. You could also consider:

- 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
- a local Taxicard scheme for subsidised taxi fares – contact your council for more information
- 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.

## 5. Wheelchairs

If you need to use your mobility equipment for long periods of time or in your home, a wheelchair may be more suitable than a mobility scooter. Wheelchairs can be manual or electric. Start by discussing this with your doctor, consultant, occupational therapist or physiotherapist. If they think you would meet the criteria, they can refer you for an assessment for the local NHS wheelchair service.

Each local wheelchair service has its own criteria to decide who qualifies for help. The assessment will look at what sort of mobility equipment would be best for you and may suggest a mobility scooter or other type of equipment if this would be more suitable than a wheelchair. 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.

### Good to know



You may have to join a waiting list for an NHS wheelchair service assessment. In some areas you may have to wait several weeks.

### Is a manual wheelchair right for me?

Manual wheelchairs need to be pushed by you or someone else. They're lighter, more manoeuvrable, more portable and cheaper than electric wheelchairs. They don't need charging and will generally require less maintenance. When folded, they're very compact, so can be easily stored in your home or put into the boot of a car when you need to transport them.

A manual wheelchair could be right for you if, for example:

- you can push yourself or have someone who can push you

- you need a wheelchair for short-term use or don't need to use it for long each day
- you can't control an electric wheelchair.

## **How much will a manual wheelchair cost?**

Manual wheelchairs cost from around £50 upwards to buy.

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

Electric wheelchairs don't need to be pushed. They are designed either for indoor use only or for both indoor and outdoor use. 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, lights 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 to take different weights, 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**, which has 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 check what you may need to pay for.

An electric wheelchair could be right for you if, for example:

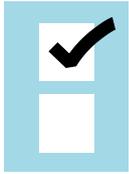
- you find it hard to push yourself in a manual wheelchair
- you need to travel long distances in the chair
- you have room to store it and use it in your home, or can adapt your home to be able to use it there.

## **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 chapter 13.

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. If you're buying, prices start from around £800 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 this can be expensive.

## 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).

## 6. Wheeled walking frames (rollators)

Walking frames can help you if you have balance problems or weak legs. They are available without wheels, but here we'll look at wheeled walkers, which can allow a more natural walking rhythm.

Walking frames are available with different numbers of wheels – usually two, three or four. Two-wheeled frames are designed for use in the home, whereas three- and four-wheeled frames tend to be larger and are designed more for outdoor use. Narrow frames are available for indoor use, which can be useful if you have a smaller property.

Three-wheeled frames are usually lighter and more manoeuvrable, but can be less stable and easier to tip than four-wheeled frames.

Three- and four-wheeled frames often have extra features, like baskets, trolleys or trays for carrying things, or seats if you need to rest occasionally.

### **Is a wheeled walking frame right for me?**

A wheeled walking frame may be a good option if:

- you can walk as far as you need to, but need some support or help with balance
- you want to move faster or with a more natural motion than a non-wheeled walker will allow
- you want a frame you can use inside or outside
- you want a walking aid that can be folded for easy storage and transportation.

They may not be suitable if:

- you need to put a lot of weight on the frame
- you can't operate the brakes.

## **How much will a wheeled walking frame cost?**

Walking frames usually cost between around £50 and £250.

### **To do**



Get a care needs assessment from your local council before you buy anything, to check if they can provide anything and to make sure that the equipment is suitable for you – see chapter 1.

## 7. Help at home

A range of equipment is available to help you live at home independently by assisting you with tasks like getting up and down stairs, standing and sitting, and sleeping comfortably.

The following chapters look at some of the larger pieces of equipment available: stairlifts, riser recliner chairs and adjustable beds. If you're looking for something different, the Disabled Living Foundation's website ([livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)) lists many types of equipment to help you at home, from small gadgets to more substantial items.

If you can't find equipment that fits your needs, you might want to consider making adaptations to your house, such as fitting a downstairs bathroom. See our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)) for more information.

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** (0800 319 6789, [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

## 8. Stairlifts

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 use the stairlift easily and safely in future? Some stairways aren't safe or suitable for a stairlift, so get advice from an occupational therapist (see chapter 1). If you decide to install one privately, request an assessment of your stairway from a stairlift company first.

Stairlifts usually have a weight limit of around 25–30 stone. You'll need to be able to transfer yourself on and off 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. Your landlord should not refuse permission if the adaptation is needed because of your health or disability unless they have a good reason. Ask for your landlord's consent in writing before making any adaptations to your home.

If you rent from a council or housing association, contact them for information – they may 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 check what you may have to pay.

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

Prices for a straight stairlift start from approximately £2,000. A complex custom-made stairlift could be more than triple 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 care needs assessment (see chapter 1) and it recommended that you need a stairlift, you may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant to help with the cost (see chapter 7). 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)).

## 9. Riser recliner chairs

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 (ie you plug them into the mains) 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 care needs assessment (see chapter 1) 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 qualify for funding to buy your own.

If you're paying for the chair yourself, see chapter 7 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 occupational therapy assessment from your local council's adult social services department to work out what you need.

## How to choose

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! If the provider offers home visits, it will be easier to do it that way.

See chapter 12 for a list of general questions to ask the provider.

### 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).

## 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 footstool.

## 10. Adjustable beds

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 (ie you plug them into the mains) 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 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, £700 to £2,200 for a double bed, and £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, 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.

## **How to choose**

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 – 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.

See chapter 12 for a list of general questions to ask the provider.

## **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 it might be possible to fit grab handles or lifting poles (a pole with a strap and handle to help you pull yourself into position) to your bed. If you need to

be regularly turned in bed, turning mattresses can be used with a standard bed. If you have a carer, sliding sheets may also help them to move you in bed – training will be required. Visit the Disabled Living Foundation's website [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk) to find out more.

# 11. 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, ask your local council or search online at [livingmadeeasy.org.uk/contacts\\_edc.php](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk/contacts_edc.php)
- The Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) has closed its own equipment demonstration centre but plans to develop new ways to demonstrate equipment to people. Contact them to find out more (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk/content/equipment-demonstration-centre](http://dlf.org.uk/content/equipment-demonstration-centre)).
- 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 (0344 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](tel:01933229644), [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](tel:03009990004), [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://livingmadeeasy.org.uk)
- Rica (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs) – [020 7427 2460](tel:02074272460), [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.

## 12. 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, think about the following:

- Does the company 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).

## 13. 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 (DFGs)

If you're disabled and need adaptations to 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 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 from your landlord for the work to be done. Landlords can also apply on behalf of a disabled tenant. You'll need to apply for the grant before you start carrying out any work on your home.

See our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** to find out more ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), [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)). 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

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.

## 14. 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.

The Disabled Living Foundation has a factsheet on finding second-hand equipment (0300 999 0004, [dlf.org.uk/factsheets/Sources\\_of\\_Second\\_Hand\\_Equipment.pdf](http://dlf.org.uk/factsheets/Sources_of_Second_Hand_Equipment.pdf) ).

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

If your equipment was provided or loaned to you by your council, NHS service or a charity, contact them to ask them to 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.

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 [disabledgear.com](http://disabledgear.com). Be careful about giving out your personal details – keep yourself safe. Action Fraud ([0300 123 2040](tel:03001232040), [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk)) provides advice about how to keep yourself safe when buying and selling online.

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.

## 16. Making a complaint

### To the council

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 care and health services** for more information ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), [independentage.org](http://independentage.org)).

### To the NHS

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 to the body that commissioned the service. This will probably be your Clinical Commissioning Group. If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you can contact the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman ([0345 015 4033](tel:03450154033), [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. Details of your local PALS are available from your local library, GP surgery, dentist surgery, or your local hospital.

## **To a private supplier**

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 helpline ([03454 04 05 06](tel:03454040506), [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 2141](tel:02077022141), [bhta.net](http://bhta.net)), you can complain directly to them.

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