

Getting help at home



Ways to stay independent



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We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.

About this guide

If you're looking for some help to stay independent in your own home, there are services, gadgets and equipment that you might benefit from.

Here are a few examples to get you started.

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Help with household chores, such as cleaning and gardening	1
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Getting help with household chores

Household chores may become a burden as you get older. They may take you longer to complete or feel harder, even if you can still manage them yourself.

But with a bit of extra help, you can keep enjoying your home and garden. Employing people to help can also mean you'll have regular company or someone to keep an extra eye out for you.

Housework and going to the laundrette were really taking it out of me because of my angina. Now a friendly woman comes four hours a week and finishes jobs that took me three days! My flat is clean as a new pin and even my shirts get ironed.

Help with cleaning

If you're considering employing a cleaner, think about how much you can afford to pay them and which tasks are most important for them to do. Be realistic about how much they'd be able to do in, say, two hours a week. Not all cleaners are happy to do all tasks so check in advance if, for example, you want them to do your ironing.

To find a cleaner, try asking your:

- friends or neighbours for local recommendations
- local Age UK if they provide cleaning services – you'll have to pay for these (**0800 169 6565**, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area)
- local council for a list of cleaning services – check their website or call their adult social services department.

If you'd only like help with laundry and ironing, check with your local dry cleaner. They may offer loyalty discounts, special rates for pensioners or a delivery service.

Help with shopping

If you still like to do your own shopping but find it hard to get around, Shop Mobility lend scooters or wheelchairs to people to use in shops or leisure facilities. Check if there's one near you by contacting Driving Mobility on **0800 559 3636** or visiting **shopmobilityuk.org**. Some schemes are free and others have a small charge.

You may be able to get help with shopping from a volunteer. Check which services are available at:

- your local Age UK (**0800 169 6565**, **ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area**)
- Royal Voluntary Service (**0845 608 0122**, **royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk**)
- local shops – for example, someone to walk round with you and help you reach items on higher shelves
- other local organisations.

You could also consider online shopping. All large supermarkets and many other shops offer this service, usually for a small delivery fee. It can be particularly helpful when buying heavy or bulky items. A few supermarkets offer telephone ordering or home delivery from the store – ask your local branch what they provide.

Help with the garden

If you have a garden, you probably like it to look its best. This may also protect you from scammers, who might think a messy or overgrown garden means someone vulnerable is living in the home.



You could look for aids to make gardening easier, such as:

- easy-grip or long-reach forks and trowels
- garden kneelers with hand rails
- lightweight watering cans with buttons to control the flow of water.

Check a local or online DIY store to see what's available. The Disabled Living Foundation also has information about equipment (0300 999 0004, [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](https://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk)).

Thrive is a charity that supports people with disabilities or long-term health conditions to keep gardening – they can provide lots of useful advice and information (0118 988 5688, carryongardening.org.uk).

If you'd prefer to employ a gardener, see if a neighbour or your local garden centre can recommend someone. Or find out if your local Age UK offers a paid-for gardening service (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area). If you're a council tenant, your council may also be able to help with garden maintenance.

Help with one-off tasks

If you need help with small, one-off practical tasks – such as moving furniture, changing lightbulbs or gardening – try the charity GoodGym. They provide volunteer runners to carry out 'mission runs' for older people in some areas. Contact GoodGym or visit their website for more information (0203 432 3920, goodgym.org).

You can also contact your local Age UK to see if they provide handyman services for a fee (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area). They may be able to help with things like putting up curtain rails, changing locks or fitting grab rails.

Equipment and adaptations to make life easier

Getting some specialist equipment or making changes to your home might be a good solution if you find it difficult to do certain things. For example, installing a stairlift or downstairs bathroom might help if you're finding the stairs difficult.

It's a good idea to get an expert opinion because there are lots of options available. Call your local council to arrange a care needs assessment that involves occupational therapy.

What happens at an assessment

Occupational therapy looks at what everyday tasks you struggle to do and if there are easier and safer ways for you to do them. They may suggest aids or equipment, or adaptations to your home, to keep you as mobile and independent as possible. This might be things like grab rails by the toilet, extra handrails on the stairs or levelling door thresholds.

During your assessment, make sure you point out any difficulties you have – for example, with getting into bed or bending down to put on shoes or plug in the vacuum cleaner. The assessment also looks at whether you need help with personal care, which includes tasks like washing and dressing.

I get dizzy if I stand for too long and it made me anxious about taking a shower. The social services sent an occupational therapist to see me. She was lovely. She arranged for a grab rail to be fitted on the wall of my shower cubicle, and a folding shower seat to the side, so I can sit down to have a shower without fearing I'm going to fall.



After your assessment

You'll be told the next steps once you've had your assessment. If you're assessed as needing equipment or minor adaptations (up to £1,000 each) the council must provide them for free.

They may not pay for very small aids, such as adapted cutlery or easy-open can openers, so you'd need to buy those yourself. Contact Living Made Easy (0300 999 0004, [livingmadeeasy.org.uk](https://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk)) for more information and a list of suppliers.

RiDC, which carries out consumer research for older and disabled people, has information about the likely costs of adaptations and equipment (020 7427 2460, ridc.org.uk).

If you're assessed as needing an adaptation that costs over £1,000 – such as a stairlift, ramps to get into your home or widening doorways – you may be able to get help to pay for it.

For example, you might be able to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) of up to £30,000, depending on your income and savings. You usually won't be able to get anything if you've already started work on your adaptations before your application has been approved, so look into it before you start.

Bear in mind that the process can take a while. You should hear within six months whether you qualify for a DFG and the work should be done within a year of the application, but it can take longer.

Speak to your council about how to apply. You could also contact a local Home Improvement Agency for advice – check if there's one in your area (**0300 124 0315, findmyhia.org.uk**).

For more information, see our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** or visit **gov.uk/disabled-facilities-grants**.

Local councils may also decide to help fund adaptations in other ways. They can choose to provide assistance – such as grants and loans – to anyone who needs to adapt or repair their home, or improve their living conditions. You can find contact details for your local council in the phone directory or on **gov.uk/find-local-council**.

Gadgets to make you feel safer

You've probably heard of personal alarms, but you might not know that there's a range of other simple technology available to help keep you safe at home.

Telecare

Telecare services involve alarms and sensors, which call for help when they're set off. This allows you to manage risks and get support in an emergency, but still keep your independence at home.



Telecare devices include:

- wearable alarms, which can be worn as a necklace, watch or clipped on to clothing
- fixed alarms, such as pull cords
- movement sensors – for example, to detect if you've fallen out of bed
- incontinence sensors
- gas shut-off devices
- pill dispensers to release medication at the right time and trigger an alarm if it isn't removed
- fire and smoke alarms that automatically call for help.

Some telecare devices connect to a support centre offering 24/7 monitoring. The support centre receives a call when your alarm goes off. They'll contact you to check you're okay, or contact a relative, neighbour or the emergency services.

Other devices use short-range sensors to alert a carer or relative in your home that something is wrong. There are also devices that autodial a pre-set number, such as the number of a neighbour or relative.

I had a small stroke last year. Now I've got this smart sensor strapped to my belt that can detect a sudden movement like me keeling over, and that rings through to a centre. It's very reassuring for my wife.

Telecare can't replace one-to-one care from another person, but it might reduce the need for some home visits from care workers and provide extra peace of mind.

How to get telecare

Your local council will offer some telecare services, but you'll have to meet certain criteria to qualify. Start by getting a care needs assessment to find out what they can offer you.

If they decide you do need support, including from telecare, you'll be given a financial assessment to work out how much you have to pay towards it. Charges will vary from area to area – telecare may be free in some areas.



You can also buy telecare privately. Do plenty of research and shop around so you get the service that suits you best. You'll usually have to pay an initial set-up fee and a weekly or monthly monitoring fee.

For more information on telecare, or to get a list of providers near you, contact:

- your local council ([gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council))
- TEC Services Association (TSA) ([01625 520 320](tel:01625520320), tsa-voice.org.uk)
- Living Made Easy ([0300 999 0004](tel:03009990004), livingmadeeasy.org.uk).

Telehealth

Telehealth devices are usually provided by your GP or another health professional, so they can monitor certain health conditions remotely. They'll show you how to use it and explain how it will help them to treat your health condition. Services will vary from area to area, but here are a couple of examples.

- If you have high blood pressure, a telehealth device can monitor your blood pressure. The results will automatically be sent to your GP, allowing them to manage your medication and alerting them if your blood pressure gets too high.
- If you have diabetes and use insulin, a telehealth device can monitor your blood sugar levels. It can alert you if your blood sugar gets too high or too low so you can adjust your insulin dosage.

If you think telehealth might be suitable for you, speak to your GP to find out what is available in your area.

For more information on telecare and telehealth, see our factsheet **Technology to help you at home**.

Staying connected at home

You may find you don't have the social opportunities you'd like. If you're living alone, you might find it hard to meet other people, particularly if you have any other difficulties-like health or mobility problems, or a low income.

If you'd like to build new connections and friendships, you could consider speaking to us about our community or telephone volunteers. They may be able to help you find new ways to get out and about. Or you could volunteer yourself (**0800 319 6789, independentage.org/get-support**).

There are lots of great ways to stay in touch these days. If you don't fancy phone calls or visits, you could try email, online video calls like Skype, or a social networking site like Facebook. If you want to learn how to use a computer or get online, see if your local council, library, Online Centre (**0114 349 1666, onlinecentresnetwork.org**) or Age UK (**0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area**) offer any simple courses. For more information on using technology, visit **independentage.org/technology**.

If you have a spare room and don't mind sharing your home, you could consider a Homeshare ([0151 227 3499](tel:01512273499), homeshareuk.org). This could provide you with extra company and some support at home, such as help with cooking, shopping or walking the dog. The scheme carefully matches people together and they provide support for each Homeshare arrangement. There may be a monthly fee.

Take a look at our guide **If you're feeling lonely** and our factsheet **How to stay socially connected** for more tips on staying connected.



5 Extra money if you need help to look after yourself

Attendance Allowance

You might be able to claim Attendance Allowance (AA) if you have:

- reached your State Pension age, and
- have a long-term illness or disability that means you need help with personal care, or supervision to keep you safe.

Personal care is help with tasks like washing, dressing, going to the toilet and moving around your home. It doesn't include household chores like cleaning or shopping. You don't need to actually be getting help with personal care to claim AA – the important thing is that you need it.

AA isn't means-tested, so you can claim it regardless of your income or savings. If you're able to get AA, you can spend the money on whatever you need.

Mum is 78 and has osteoarthritis in her hands, shoulders and hips, so dressing, washing and moving around the house takes her ages and is painful. We were told she could claim Attendance Allowance. She was awarded it and can now afford to pay someone to help her do the things she finds difficult. She still wants to wash and dress herself but prefers to have a shower when the carer is there to help.

How to apply for Attendance Allowance

Call the AA helpline **(0800 731 0122)** to ask for a claim form, or download one from **gov.uk/government/publications/attendance-allowance-claim-form**. For help to fill out the form, contact your local Citizens Advice (**0800 144 8848**, **citizensadvice.org.uk**) or Age UK (**0800 169 6565**, **ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area**).

See our guide **Attendance Allowance** for more information.

Personal Independence Payment

If you're under your State Pension age you might be able to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP). PIP is a benefit for people who have problems with daily living activities or mobility, because of a long-term illness or disability. Applying for PIP involves an assessment as well as filling in a claim form.

For more information, see our factsheet **Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance**.

Get a benefits check

It's worth getting a benefits check to see if there's anything else you could be claiming. Try our online calculator (independentage.org/benefit-calculator) or call us on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a benefits check.

If you were already getting Pension Credit, Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit and are now getting Attendance Allowance or PIP, you may get an additional amount for severe disability added to these benefits. If you're not already receiving these benefits, you may now qualify for them.

Home from hospital help

If you've been in hospital, you might need some short or longer-term support to get you back on your feet. The right support for you will depend on your particular needs.

Volunteers to welcome you home

Some voluntary organisations offer home from hospital services. This might include taking you home, collecting prescriptions, picking up groceries or visiting for a few weeks afterwards. Try:

- the Royal Voluntary Service (0845 608 0122, royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/get-help/hospital-support)
- the British Red Cross (0344 871 1111, redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-support-at-home)
- Age UK (0800 169 6565, ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area)
- local charities or volunteer visitors at your hospital.

Extra support after your hospital stay

If you'll need extra support after you're discharged, the hospital should arrange some short-term help for you. They should also refer you on for any other assessments you need after leaving hospital, such as a care needs or NHS Continuing Healthcare assessment. These look at any ongoing help you might need.

Reablement support

You might be entitled to some free short-term care to help you regain your independence, sometimes known as intermediate care or reablement. These services aim to help you:

- keep or relearn skills you need to live independently
- stay out of hospital in the future
- stay in your own home for longer.

If you qualify, they should be provided free of charge for a certain time period, usually between 1–6 weeks. You may be asked to pay for services that are longer than six weeks.

For more about reablement and what happens when you leave hospital, read our factsheet **Hospital stays**.

When I got home nothing was arranged, no carers at all. I just sat in an armchair in the kitchen – I couldn't even walk to my bathroom. Fortunately my friend stepped in to help, but it was quite frightening. I wouldn't want it to happen to anyone else.

Before you leave hospital, make sure you know who is responsible for providing any care you need, who is paying for it, and how you can contact them. If you have any concerns about an upcoming discharge, call Independent Age on **0800 319 6789**.

If you're unhappy about any aspect of your discharge, you can make a complaint within 12 months of leaving hospital. The hospital's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) should be able to help you. Call your GP or hospital, or search online (**nhs.uk/service-search**) to find your local PALS. For more information, see our factsheet **Complaints about health services**.

7 Help with personal care at home

If you need help to look after yourself but want to stay in your own home, you could consider getting personal care at home.

Just like getting equipment and telecare, the best place to start is with a care needs assessment from your local council. Check the phone book for their details or visit [gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services](https://www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services).

What is personal care?

Personal care refers to help to look after your physical needs. For example:

- washing yourself
- dressing and undressing
- going to the toilet
- getting into and out of bed
- preparing and eating food
- getting enough to drink
- reminders to take medication.

Personal care is different from nursing care, which is given by a registered nurse and includes things like giving injections or changing dressings.

Getting personal care through your council

A care needs assessment is a chance for you to describe any problems you have. Try to be as specific as possible. For example, "I need help twice a day to wash and dress, and then get undressed and ready for bed. It takes me a long time and I get very tired", rather than "I need help with washing". It's a good idea to ask to have someone else with you at the assessment.

The assessor should take your views and wishes into account, as well as your needs. They should also consider and discuss how your care needs affect your wellbeing, and whether there are services that can help you to achieve what you want.

After your assessment, you should be given information about where you can get the help you need. If your care needs are high enough, the council will arrange the help for you.

Whether or not you qualify, you'll be given a copy of your care needs assessment explaining what your needs are. This can be helpful if you are arranging care services yourself.



There are many services that the assessment might suggest would suit you, including:

- home care – for example, visits from a care worker to help you to wash and dress, or respite care to give a family carer a break
- attending a day centre
- telecare
- mobility equipment, such as walking frames
- moving into more suitable accommodation (you shouldn't be pressured into moving anywhere you don't want to)
- making adaptations to your home.

If you qualify for council help, you'll have a separate financial assessment to work out whether you have to pay for any of it. This will look at your income and savings. If the council is paying for any of your care, you'll have options about how you receive it:

- the council can arrange and provide your care
- the council can spend an agreed amount of money on care services you choose
- the council can give you the money they've worked out is needed to meet your needs (your personal budget). You can spend this on services you choose, as long as they meet your assessed needs. This is called a direct payment.

For more information on the care needs assessment and financial assessment, see our factsheet **First steps in getting help with your care needs**.

If a relative or friend is caring for you at home, they can also get a carer's assessment from the council to see if there's any help they could be getting. For more information, read our factsheet **Getting help from the council as a carer**.

Finding a care worker yourself

If you're finding a care worker yourself, you can employ them directly or through an agency.

If you employ a care worker directly, you'll have more control over who cares for you and what they do, but you'll also have legal responsibilities as an employer. For instance, you'll need to get employers' liability insurance. Many people find it simpler to arrange home care through an agency.

If you're looking for a local home care agency, try:

- your council – they'll probably have a directory of local services on their website, or call them to ask
- the Care Quality Commission (03000 616161, [cqc.org.uk](https://www.cqc.org.uk)) – they inspect care services and can provide you with inspection reports for home care agencies
- the UK Home Care Association (020 8661 8188, portal.ukhca.co.uk/findprovider/findprovider.aspx) – they have a database of member agencies. Members must agree to certain quality standards.

If you're employing a care worker directly, a local disability organisation or independent living centre might be able to help you find someone reliable. Gov.uk has some useful information on your responsibilities as an employer ([gov.uk/employing-staff](https://www.gov.uk/employing-staff)).

Costs of employing a care worker vary from area to area and depend on the time of day you need care. They can range from £15–30 an hour, but live-in carers, for example, could cost a lot more than this. Be realistic about what you can afford. It's best to ask for a quote first.

Make a list of questions you want to ask a care worker or home care agency in advance. For a checklist of things to ask, see our factsheet **Arranging home care**.



Jenny's story

"We moved to this house 44 years ago. About three years ago, I started to find things more difficult. My eyesight was getting worse and I have arthritis, so I was struggling to use the stairs and do things like change my clothes, read the post or knit. Before that I was really fit – I used to be a belly dancer!

"I got in touch with social services and they came and did an assessment just a week later, so I was lucky with that. I talked to the assessor about what would help, and we decided that some grab rails on the walls and a rail next to my bed would help me move around more safely. They also suggested some larger adaptations and gave me the details of who to call and how to apply for a grant.

"A few months later, I got a stairlift put in and a wet room, which has been a great help. The only problem is that the wet room is upstairs. It would be nice to have a downstairs bathroom.

"I would tell anyone in my position to call their council for help – you've got nothing to lose. People think they're nosy, but they were so respectful when they came round. They're there to help. Make sure you plan ahead because there could be a wait before you get the help. My sister-in-law's husband went downhill quickly and she tried to get stuff done but couldn't because there was a year waiting list – you've got to do it before you actually really, really need it.

"I can enjoy my home and garden again. I've lived here a long time and I've got brilliant neighbours. I'm so pleased I can still live here independently."



Picture posed by model

8 Making a complaint

If you're unhappy with any of the services you're receiving, or with any of the council's assessments, you may want to make a complaint. You should make your complaint as soon as possible.

Complaints to the council

You can complain to the council for a number of reasons, including if:

- you don't agree with the outcome of your care needs assessment or occupational therapy assessment
- there have been delays in getting an assessment
- you don't think your personal budget is high enough to meet your needs
- you don't think you're being charged the correct amount, and the council won't reconsider the charges
- you're concerned about the quality of the services you're receiving
- you don't agree with the outcome of a Disabled Facilities Grant application.

Start by raising your complaint informally with staff. If this doesn't resolve the issue, you can make a formal complaint using the council complaints procedure.

If you're paying for your own care

If you're paying for your own care, you can complain to the care agency or care worker. All care agencies must have a complaints procedure.

If you want to take your complaint further, you can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (**0300 061 0614**, **lgo.org.uk**). They look into complaints about councils and care agencies.

Help to make a complaint

If you need support to make a complaint, ask a relative or friend for help or speak to your local Citizens Advice (**0800 144 8848**, **citizensadvice.org.uk**).

For more information on making a complaint and other options for challenging decisions about your care, see our factsheet **Complaints about social care services**.

If you disagree with a benefits decision

If you've been turned down for Attendance Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, you can ask the Department for Work and Pensions to reconsider the decision. Make sure you do this by the deadline given on the decision letter. For more about challenging a benefits decision, contact our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

If you're worried about abuse

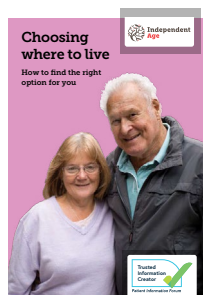
Abuse can happen anywhere and can take many forms, such as financial, physical, sexual, psychological abuse or neglect.

If you're concerned about any behaviour from care staff that doesn't seem right, it's important to speak up. Contact the council or police immediately, or speak to Hourglass for advice (**0808 808 8141, wearehourglass.org**).

For more information, see our guide **Staying in control when you're older**.

Our free advice guides

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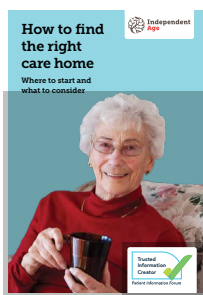
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Our practical, jargon-free advice guides give you the information you need to get the most out of older age.

To find out about our full range of guides and order copies, call 0800 319 6789 or visit independentage.org/publications

About Independent Age

At Independent Age, we want more people in the UK to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. That's why we support people aged over 65 to get involved in things they enjoy. We also campaign and give advice on the issues that matter most: health and care, money and housing.

For information or advice – we can arrange a free, impartial chat with an adviser – call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6.30pm) or email us at advice@independentage.org.

You can also support this work by volunteering with us, joining our campaigns to improve life for older people experiencing hardship, donating to us or remembering us in your will.

For more information, visit independentage.org or call us on **0800 319 6789**.



Independent Age
18 Avonmore Road
London
W14 8RR

T 020 7605 4200
E charity@independentage.org
www.independentage.org
Helpline 0800 319 6789

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