



July 2005

Key Points:

- Replaces previous version dated July 2004

Disability equipment and how to get it

The information in this factsheet is aimed at people aged 60 and over.

Readers living in Scotland can obtain a similar Factsheet 42s, *Disability equipment and how to get it* available by phoning 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or by writing to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ.

Contact details for Age Concern Scotland are:

Causewayside House, 160
Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PR tel:
0845 125 9732 (local call rate), website:
www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk;

Those living in Wales or Northern Ireland may wish to contact:

Age Concern Cymru, Ty John Pathy,
Units 13/14 Neptune Court, Vanguard
Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ, tel: 029 2043
1555 (national call rate); website:
www.accymru.org.uk;

Age Concern Northern Ireland, 3 Lower
Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR, tel: 028
9032 5055 (national call rate) Monday to
Friday 9.30am - 1pm, website:
www.ageconcernni.org.

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1. Community equipment

Daily living equipment

If you feel you need equipment to help you manage more safely and easily around the home, contact the social services department of your local council. They will usually arrange for you to have an assessment in your home by a specialist social worker or an occupational therapist, often referred to as an OT. You do not have to have a letter from your doctor supporting your needs but this can sometimes speed up the process.

Examples of daily living equipment include:

- products for personal care and hygiene, helping you to use the bath or toilet, eg grab rails, bath boards, raised toilet seats etc;
- products for food preparation, eg lever taps, adapted kitchen utensils;
- products to help with the use of beds and chairs, eg bed raisers.

Under the *Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 (CSDP Act)*, social services departments have a duty to make arrangements for the provision of services to support disabled people. If you are disabled, social services must assess your need for services. If your assessed needs meet local eligibility criteria¹, you will have a right to services that help to meet those needs.

Your local council is legally entitled to take its own resources into account when setting its eligibility criteria. Once it is satisfied that a service is required under those criteria, a lack of resources at that stage is not a valid reason for failing to provide services. More information about the *CSDP Act* can be found in Factsheet 32, *Disability and ageing: your rights to social services* (see section 10).

The Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc) Act (Qualifying Services) (England) Regulations 2003 requires that any item of community equipment which a person is assessed as needing as a community care service, and for which the individual is eligible, is required to be provided free of charge.

All minor adaptations costing £1,000 or less (which includes the cost of buying and fitting the adaptation) are required to be provided free of charge. Councils retain the discretion to make a charge in relation to minor adaptations that cost more than £1,000 to provide.

Larger, more expensive items may be classed as adaptations and will be the responsibility of the housing department through disabled facilities grants.

¹ Eligibility criteria must follow LAC(2002)13 Fair Access to Care Services - Guidance on eligibility criteria for adult social care.

Further information about disabled facilities grants is provided in Factsheet 13, *Older home owners: financial help with repairs and adaptations* (see section 10).

Equipment to meet health related needs

Some items of equipment such as a commode or a walking aid will meet both health and daily living needs. Your GP or a district nurse may arrange for you to receive these items or they may suggest you approach social services for a broader assessment of your needs.

Walking equipment should be provided following an assessment by a physiotherapist. A physiotherapist will be able to recommend the most appropriate aid and ensure you know how to use it safely. The Disabled Living Foundation produces a factsheet *Choosing Walking Equipment* (see section 9.1).

If you are hard of hearing and might benefit from a hearing aid, contact your GP who may refer you to your local hospital for a hearing test. You have a right to have your hearing assessed, particularly if you think your hearing loss is becoming a problem. The NHS issues hearing aids on free loan to patients.

Low vision aids may be able to help with particular sight problems. Low vision services are mainly found in hospital eye departments. They can make magnifiers and other low vision aids available on loan.

Your local social services department may provide a range of support services or employ specialist social workers to help people with sight or hearing loss. For further information about help available to those with a hearing or visual impairment (see section 9).

Some items such as wigs or fabric supports may be issued on an NHS prescription for which there is a specified charge.

If you receive the guarantee part of Pension Credit you will not have to pay for such items. If you are on a low income, you may qualify for help with these charges under the NHS low income scheme. Ask for a copy of the NHS leaflet HC11 *Help with health costs* at your local post office or see Age Concern IS20, *Help with health costs for older people*.

2. Wheelchairs

If you have long term mobility problems, use of a wheelchair could help you to maintain your mobility and independence. Your GP or hospital consultant or social services staff can refer you to your local NHS wheelchair centre for an assessment.

The wheelchair centre will provide an assessment of your medical and lifestyle needs and if you are eligible can help you to choose a suitable chair. Each centre has its own criteria to be used when assessing who is eligible for a wheelchair.

Wheelchairs are provided by the NHS on free long-term loan. They are usually standard models and there is not always a great choice. If you are assessed as requiring one, the NHS can provide an electrically powered wheelchair suitable for indoor/outdoor use. Any wheelchair provided officially belongs to the NHS and is loaned to you for as long as required. The NHS will pay for servicing or repairs so long as these are not caused by misuse or neglect.

Wheelchair vouchers may also be offered to people assessed as needing a wheelchair. The voucher is worth the value of a standard chair and can be put towards the purchase of a more expensive wheelchair than the NHS would provide free. You may not be able to use the voucher scheme to get a powered wheelchair.

If you receive the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance or War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement, and you need an outdoor electric wheelchair (or scooter) you can use the Motability scheme to pay for it. Contact Motability for more information (see section 9.1).

For more information about Disability Living Allowance see Factsheet 34 *Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance* (see section 10).

It may also be possible to get charitable help in purchasing a wheelchair. Charity Search may be able to advise about sources of charitable funding (see section 8.3).

If you need a wheelchair on a temporary basis it may be possible to hire or borrow one on short term loan from the British Red Cross or other voluntary organisation. See section 7.3.

The Disabled Living Foundation produces factsheets with information about wheelchairs and scooters (see section 9.1).

3. Community alarms

Community alarm systems allow you to be linked up 24 hours a day to a central service which can offer help in an emergency. The link is usually either by telephone; pull cord or a pendant which you wear round your neck - or a combination of these. If you need to summon help urgently and are unable to make a normal telephone call then you can use the pendant, pull the cord or use a special button on the telephone to contact a control centre. This centre is be staffed by people who can talk to you, find out what you need and summon help as appropriate.

In an emergency, the alarm operator gets in touch with the people you have agreed should be contacted in such circumstances, such as neighbours or relatives living nearby. They will have a set of keys to your home. The alarm operator also contacts the appropriate emergency service.

Your local council may provide you with an alarm service. Each council has different rules about who they will supply, how they run the service and how much they charge. Contact your local social services department or housing department for details about the schemes available locally.

Your local Age Concern may also have information about what is available in your area. Their address and telephone number should be in your local telephone directory, or call the Age Concern Information Line (see section 10).

The Research Institute for Consumer Affairs (Ricability) can provide some information on what alarms are and how to obtain one (see section 9.3). The Disabled Living Foundation produces a factsheet *Choosing a personal alarm system* (see section 9.1).

4. Equipment for employment

The Access to Work scheme may fund equipment needed for work. Contact the Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus for advice and assistance.

5. Things to consider in choosing equipment

Always try to get independent or professional advice in choosing equipment, particularly if it is a large, expensive item. Occupational therapists or physiotherapists from a hospital, social services department or employed by a Disabled Living Centre or Independent Living Centre (see section 9.1) should be able to advise you on equipment which is suitable for your needs and on what is available.

You may also want to consider the following points when choosing equipment for yourself:

- make sure that any products which you buy comply with the necessary British Standards. Equipment which has been tested and approved by the British Standards Institution will be marked with the BSI Kitemark;
- check out how comfortable the equipment is and that it is easy for you to use. Where possible, try it out beforehand. If you are purchasing expensive equipment to help with bathing or toileting, you may want to ask for a trial of the product in your own home so that you can try it out properly. Make sure that it can be used in the environment in which you want to use it;

- make sure that the equipment is in good condition and that it is suitable for the task you require it for. Check that the equipment is easy for you to use without help, and that appropriate and clear instructions for use or training in use are provided;
- if you will need to transport the equipment, for example a wheelchair or other walking aid, consider how easy this will be. Does it fold up or come apart? Is it easy to do this? Will it fit in your car? Consider whether there is enough space to store it in your home;
- check about repair and maintenance of the equipment. Will it be possible to find spare parts and someone to repair the equipment if necessary? Does the equipment need to be serviced regularly and if so how much will this cost? What sort of 'after-sales service' does the company you are buying from provide? Does the equipment come with a guarantee?
- check what is the company policy on returning the equipment if you don't need it any more, for example, your needs may change or you will have to move a care home. Some companies have buy-back guarantee scheme; check the details of the scheme, for example, how much money will you receive when returning the item.

For larger items such as electric scooters or power chairs you may want to consider getting insurance to cover accidents and breakdown repairs.

6. Problems with equipment

6.1 Problems getting equipment

It can be difficult to get the equipment you think you need from social services or the health service. There will be strict eligibility criteria (see section 1). There can also be long waiting times for obtaining disability equipment, either for an OT assessment or before actually receiving the equipment. There is no legal time within which disability equipment must be provided but you should not have to wait longer than is reasonable and excessive delays can be challenged.

Each local authority social services department is required by law to have a complaints procedure which you can use to complain about the service or the assessment of your needs. You can also approach the Local Government Ombudsman, but only after you have exhausted the complaints procedure. Further details of these procedures are included in Age Concern Factsheet 32, *Disability and ageing: your rights to social services* (see section 10).

If you have a complaint about service that you have accessed through the NHS you can contact your local Patient Advocacy and Liaison Services (PALS). They represent patients' interests within the NHS. They will be able to give you information about the complaints procedure and help find support if you need it. To obtain the address and telephone number of your local PALS you can call NHS Direct, tel: 0845 46 47 (local call rate - 24 hours) or visit the website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk.

Further details on the NHS complaints procedure are also included in Age Concern Factsheet 44, *NHS services and older people* (see section 10).

6.2 Problems with equipment you have purchased

If you are not happy with the equipment you have purchased, get in touch with the supplier as soon as possible. It may be able to arrange for an exchange or replacement. If equipment is faulty then you should be able to have it repaired, replaced or obtain a refund. You do not have to accept a credit note.

You may want to make your complaint first verbally to the store manager. If you are not happy with the outcome you should put it in writing. You may also decide to report the seller, with details of your complaint, to your local Trading Standards service at your local council. These services are provided by local authorities, and investigate false, misleading or inaccurate claims about services or products. They can also advise on consumer problems.

A Citizens Advice Bureau may also be able to advise you about your rights. It will be listed in the telephone directory.

The supplier of your equipment may be a member of the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA). This means that it agrees to meet certain service standards. If your supplier is a member of the BHTA and you are not happy with its service you can complain to the BHTA. A list of member firms is also available (see section 9.1).

The Disabled Living Foundation has a factsheet *Making a complaint* (see section 9.1).

7. Buying equipment

7.1 Private companies and shops

A number of private companies sell disability equipment. Some provide mail order catalogues or have shops and showrooms. Look in your local Yellow Pages under 'Disabled Equipment' to see what is available in your area.

Some large high street chemists stock smaller items of daily living equipment. They may also have their own mail order catalogues.

7.2 Buying second-hand

You may also be able to buy equipment second-hand. Second-hand equipment is advertised in a number of places, including:

- *Disability Now*, a newspaper published by Scope (see section 9.2);
- the Disability Equipment Register produces a national magazine which lists second-hand equipment both for sale and wanted. The magazine is available on subscription from: Disability Equipment Register, 4 Chatterton Road, Yate, Bristol BS37 4BJ, tel: 01454 318818, website: www.disabilityequipment.org.uk;
- the Disabled Living Foundation produces a factsheet listing journals that carry advertisements for second-hand equipment (see section 9.1);
- equipment may also be advertised in your local paper.

7.3 Loans of equipment

The local **Red Cross** can often loan wheelchairs and some other equipment for short periods, for example for the visit of a relative or in the case of a temporary injury. It should be listed in the local telephone directory (usually under British Red Cross) or you can find it on the Red Cross website: www.redcross.org.uk.

Your local **Age Concern** can sometimes loan wheelchairs. It should be listed in your local telephone directory or you can call the Age Concern Information Line (see section 10).

Shopmobility schemes lend or hire manual and powered wheelchairs and powered scooters to those people who need them to shop and use other facilities in town centres. There are schemes throughout the UK. A printed directory of affiliated shopmobility schemes in the UK is available by sending a cheque for £5 (inc. postage & packing) payable to NFS. For more information contact: The National Federation of Shopmobility UK (see section 9.1).

Disabled Living Centres or **DIALs** (see section 9.1) may be able to provide you with information about wheelchair hire services or Shopmobility schemes locally.

The Disabled Living Foundation can provide a list of wheelchair hire services in London (see section 9.1).

7.4 VAT

Disabled people do not have to pay VAT when purchasing equipment which is designed or adapted to help daily living. To qualify for this exemption the equipment must be intended for use by disabled people and must relate to their disability.

In addition, there is no VAT payable on the costs of servicing or maintaining disability equipment. Ask whether you can receive this VAT exemption before buying or ordering equipment.

The supplier will have to be registered for VAT. You will also need to sign a form declaring that you have a chronic illness or disability.

Further information on VAT exemption is provided in the HM Revenue and Customs VAT leaflet 701/7/02, *VAT Reliefs for People with Disabilities*. Copies of this leaflet and further advice should be available from your local VAT office (it should be listed in your local telephone book) or ring the National Advice Service on 0845 010 9000 (local call rate), textphone 0845 000 0200 (local call rate).

8. Sources of funding

If purchasing equipment privately you may be able to get help with the cost from other sources of funding.

8.1 State Benefits

If you are disabled, you may be entitled to Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. These are benefits to help disabled people meet the extra cost of living expenses relating to their disability. They provide additional income which may help to purchase equipment. There are further details about these benefits and how to claim them in Age Concern Factsheet 34, *Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance* (see section 10).

8.2 Social Fund

If you are on Pension Credit, income-based Job Seeker Allowance or Income Support you may be able to get a Community Care Grant from the Social Fund. These grants are available to enable people to remain at home rather than going into a care home (although this does not mean you must be in immediate risk of needing care). They can cover specialist furniture and furnishings which might include daily living equipment. Medical, surgical, optical, aural or dental equipment are specifically excluded. This is either because the health service has responsibility for providing them or because there are other arrangements for helping people on low incomes get assistance with the costs.

Community Care Grants are discretionary and depend on the decision made by the local Social Fund officer. If you cannot get a grant you may be able to get a Budgeting Loan from the Social Fund. See Factsheet 49, *Help from the Social Fund* for more information (see section 10).

8.3 Charities and other sources

You may be able to get financial help with buying disability equipment from charities.

Charity Search, 25 Portview Road, Avonmouth, Bristol BS11 9LD or FREEPOST (BS6610), Avonmouth, Bristol BS11 9TW, tel: 0117 982 4060. A charity providing free advice for older people, to link them with established charities which may be able to help with funds. Does not itself give grants to individuals.

The Disabled Living Foundation, provides information about equipment for daily living and specialist advice service on clothing. Also produces a factsheet on ways of raising funds to purchase equipment; *Sources of funding and obtaining equipment for disabled and older people* (see section 9.1)

9. Further information

9.1 Organisations

Disabled and Independent Living Centres

There are a number of local Disabled Living Centres of Independent Living Centres throughout the country.

They provide advice and information about a range of aids and equipment and can display and demonstrate this equipment. Further information about Disabled Living Centres and whether there is a centre near you is available from:

Disabled Living Centres Council, Redbank House, 4 St Chad's Street, Manchester M8 8QA, tel: 0870 770 2866 textphone: 0870 770 5813 (national call rate), website: www.dlcc.org.uk. Has information about Disabled Living Centres throughout the UK and is the national voice for disabled/independent living centres.

DIAL UK, St Catherine's, Tickhill Road, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN4 8QN, tel: 01302 310123, textphone: 01302 310123, website: www.dialuk.org.uk. DIAL (the Disability Information and Advice Line) is a network of local groups throughout the country providing information and advice to disabled people on a range of issues. DIAL UK should be able to tell you if there is a group in your local area or it may be in the local telephone directory.

The Disabled Living Foundation (DLF), 380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU, helpline tel: 0845 130 9177 (local call rate), textphone: 020 7432 8009, website: www.dlf.org.uk. The DLF provides advice and information on disability equipment and assisted products. It has factsheets on a variety of subjects, including choosing wheelchairs or other equipment.

You can also visit the Equipment Demonstration Centre where a large number of items are displayed. The Centre does not sell, hire or loan equipment. If you would like advice from trained staff you need to ring for an appointment; tel: 020 7289 6111.

British Healthcare Trades Association, 1 Webbs Court, Buckhurst Avenue, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1LZ, tel: 01732 458868, website: www.bhta.com.

Motability, Motability Operations, City gate House, 22 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HB, tel: 0845 456 4566 (local call rate), textphone: 01279 632273, website: www.motability.co.uk.

The National Federation of Shopmobility UK, The Hawkins Suite, Enham Place, Enham Alamein, Andover, Hants SP11 6JS, tel: 08456 442 446 (local call rate), website: www.justmobility.co.uk/shop.

Royal Association of Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London EC1V 8AF, tel: 020 7250 3222, textphone: 020 7250 4119, website: radar.org.uk. RADAR is a campaigning and advisory disability body run by and for disabled people.

9.2 Charities providing advice to people with a particular disability

Alzheimer's Society, Gordon House, 10 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PH, helpline tel: 0845 300 0336 (local call rate), general admin tel: 020 7306 0606, website: www.alzheimers.org.uk. Supports people with all types of dementia, their families and carers, and provides information about all forms of dementia.

Arthritis Care, 18 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD, tel: 020 7380 6500, helpline tel: 0808 800 4050 (free call), website: www.arthritiscare.org.uk. Advice and information by trained counsellors, some of whom have arthritis. 600 branches, for people with arthritis and their families.

Parkinson's Disease Society, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ, tel: 020 7931 8080, helpline: 0808 800 0303 (free call), website: www.parkinsons.org.uk. Helps people with Parkinson's Disease and their relatives with problems arising from this disease; collects and disseminates information on the disease; encourages and provides funds for research.

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), 105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE, tel: 020 7388 1266, helpline: 08457 669 999 (local call rate), website: www.rnib.org.uk. Many services for people with visual impairments.

Royal National Institute for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (RNID), 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL, tel: 020 7296 8000, textphone: 0808 808 9000 (free call), voice helpline tel: 0808 808 0123 (free call), website: www.rnid.org.uk. Provides information, residential care, communication service, disability and deaf awareness training. Has a range of factsheets and leaflets about special equipment including *Buying a hearing aid* and *Digital hearing aid*.

Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW, tel: 020 7619 7100, helpline: 0808 800 3333 (free call), website: www.scope.org.uk. Disability organisation whose focus is people with cerebral palsy - provides information and advice.

Stroke Association, Stroke House, 240 City Road, London EC1V 2PR, tel: 020 7566 0300 (switchboard), information line tel: 0845 30 33 100 (local call rate), website: www.stroke.org.uk. Provides an information service and has some community services in different parts of England and Wales. Can also refer enquirers to stroke clubs throughout England and Wales.

9.3 Publications

Ricability (Research and Information for Consumers with Disabilities) has publications that you might find useful:

1. *What's new? a guide to easier and safer living (2002)* (send 35p SAE)
2. *Calling for help: a guide to Community Alarms (2003)* (send 47p SAE)
3. *Easier Living: a guide for elderly and disabled people (2001)*
(available only from the website)

All available free on receipt of a large SAE, from Ricability, 30 Angel Gate, City Rd, London EC1V 2PT, tel: 020 7427 2460, textphone: 020 7427 2469, website: www.ricability.org.uk.

A Practical Guide for Disabled People or Carers – Code: 29614 (2005 edition available end July 2005). Available free from the Department of Health, PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH, tel: 08701 555 455 (national call rate), website: www.dh.gov.uk.

10. Further information from Age Concern

The following factsheets may be of use:

Factsheet 6	<i>Finding help at home</i>
Factsheet 13	<i>Older home owners: financial help with repairs and adaptations</i>
Factsheet 32	<i>Disability and ageing: your rights to social services</i>
Factsheet 34	<i>Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance</i>
Factsheet 44	<i>NHS services</i>
Factsheet 49	<i>Help from the Social Fund</i>

If you would like

- to find your nearest Age Concern
- any additional factsheets mentioned (up to a maximum of 5 will be sent free of charge)
- a full list of factsheets and/or a book catalogue
- to receive this information in large print

phone 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or write to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ. For people with hearing loss who have access to a textphone, calls can be made by TYPETALK, which relays conversations between text and voice via an operator.

Age Concern's series of over 40 factsheets is available as a subscription service to those whose work involves older people. For details please call 0870 500 99 66 (national rate) and ask for our factsheet subscription leaflet.

Age Concern provides factsheets free to older people, their families and people who work with them. If you would like to make a donation to our work, you can send a cheque or postal order (made payable to Age Concern England) to the Personal Fundraising Department, ACE Freepost CN1794, London SW16 4BR.

Find out more about Age Concern England online on www.ageconcern.org.uk.

Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age Concern. Whilst every effort is made to ensure accuracy, Age Concern cannot be held responsible for errors or omissions.

No factsheet can ever be a complete guide to the law, which also changes from time to time. Therefore please ensure that you have an up to date factsheet and that it clearly applies to your situation. Legal advice should always be taken if you are in doubt. (*Age Concern England is unable to give financial or legal advice*).

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