Adapting your home: Access into and around your home

Disclaimer

This factsheet is for advice and guidance only. It is not intended to replace advice from a medical professional. Please ensure you follow manufacturer's instructions for use and that you carry out appropriate risk assessments.

Introduction

There are a number of features that may make it more difficult to get in and out of your home and to get around indoors. This might include:

- Narrow door openings or heavy doors.
- Raised thresholds, steps and stairs.
- Steep or sloping paths and driveways.
- Narrow corridors.
- Changes in levels.

This factsheet provides guidance on what you need to consider when planning adaptations, depending on what difficulties you have, and provides suggestions for adaptations to make it easier and safer for you to:

- Approach your home.
- Get in and out of your home.
- Get around inside your home.

Your individual needs

Everyone is different and will have different needs/priorities. When planning an adaptation to improve access, especially if it requires extensive and permanent construction, there are a number of factors to consider:

- Will the adaptation meet your needs in the long term?
- If your abilities vary day to day, will adaptation meet your needs on the worst days?
- If you use a walking frame or wheelchair indoors, how much space is needed to move?
- Is your wheelchair self-propelled or powered?
- If you rely on walking frame or wheeled walker outdoors, do you need step-free access?
- If you find steps are difficult, do you need handrails?
- If you sometimes need to use a wheelchair, how do you get it over the threshold?
- Do or will the adaptations meet the needs of other people living in the house?

Barriers to easy access into your home

Making it easier and safer to access your home will depend on a number of factors:

- Do you live on a steep and sloping site?
- Do you have steps up to your front door?
- Does the front door have a raised threshold?
- If you live in a flat above ground level, do you have lift access?
- How close can you park your vehicle?

There are a variety of conditions that can impact on your ability to get into and around your home. You may have difficulties with:

Mobility

- Reliance on support of rails to get up and down steps or stairs or over thresholds.
- Reliance on a walking frame, walking stick or crutches for support.
- Using a wheelchair to move about.
- Using a wheelchair to go further distances outdoors.

Grip strength, Visual access and/or Memory, orientation and understanding

- Difficulties operating keys, locks and door handles.
- Sight loss making it difficult to locate a front door and find your way around your home.
- Difficulties with memory and understanding, that make it increasingly difficult to find your way around and recognise your own front door, find and use key facilities such as the toilet and find key items in your kitchen or bedroom.
- Are you or the person you support aware of safety aspects, or do you/they require supervision inside or outside of the home?

Parking

Whether you are able to drive, or rely on someone else to drive, you may have difficulties getting from the car to your front entrance.

Off street parking

- If you live in a house, you may have a driveway with space to park a car off the main street.
- If you are using a wheelchair or walking aid, you will need sufficient space to the side or to the rear of the car to get in and out safely.

Parking bays accessible for wheelchair users

- For wheelchair users a minimum width of 1200mm to the side and rear of the parking area is recommended. The additional space is to allow for ease of approach to get in and out of the car from the side or rear depending on what kind of vehicle you have. Some wheelchair-accessible vehicles are accessed via a ramp or lifting platform from the rear.
- Cars and adapted vehicles may be different lengths and widths - for example ambulance or community transport providers may use larger vehicles. If you require assistance of someone to get in or out of a vehicle this will also increase the space you require.
- Further guidance is laid out in the Building Regulations 2010, 'Approved Document M' and the Wheelchair Housing Design Guide (3rd Edition).

Access to roadside parking

- If you are a wheelchair user and the drive is sloped, it will be more difficult to be assisted to approach and get in/out of a car, due to the risk of you rolling forwards or backwards. You may need to adapt the front access with ramping so that you can get to the roadside and into the car from the pavement.
- If you have limited mobility, it may take you longer than usual to get in and out of your car. Covered parking can protect you from weather, such as car ports or covered porches.
- Consider lighting for dark and winter nights.

On street parking

- Many areas of towns now have paid residents parking. However, this does not guarantee you a parking space outside your home.

Blue Badges

A Blue Badge will entitle you, or the person who is driving you, to park without penalty or charge in many parking areas. There are some local variations in different councils, as to where you are entitled to park. If you are in receipt of any of the following, you will automatically qualify for a Blue Badge:

- Higher rate of the Disability Living Allowance.
- Personal Independence Payment for being unable to walk more than 50 metres.
- Registered blind.
- Receive a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement.

You may still be eligible if you have a permanent and substantial disability that means you are unable to walk, or if you are unable to walk very far without experiencing considerable difficulty or without it causing you overwhelming psychological distress.

From 30 August 2019 those with non-visible (hidden) conditions such as mental health issues, brain injury, arthritis and autism can access Blue Badges in England.

Details on eligibility and how to apply are laid out in the Department of Transport Guidance: Who can get a Blue Badge?

Local authorities administer Blue Badges, and you can contact your local council for more information about the scheme. You can also check if you're eligible, apply or renew a Blue Badge online.

Disabled Parking Bays

If you find it difficult to get from the car to your home and you do not have off-street parking, you may be entitled to have a marked Disabled Parking Bay outside your home. You need to contact your local council to find out eligibility. If this is provided it will be available for use by ANY Blue Badge holder and so does not provide dedicated parking.

Approach routes: Paths

Surface and slip resistance

It is important to ensure surfaces of paths are level or gently sloping, well maintained and kept free of moss or any other plant materials that may increase risk of slips. The ground surface should be even, smooth and free of loose materials such as gravel, that can make it more difficult for wheelchair users or people using walking frames or sticks.

Widths of paths

The width of a path will depend on your mobility, whether you need to use a walking frame, wheeled rollator, wheelchair, or mobility scooter. Also consider if you require assistance of someone when walking as this will increase the required width.

Sloping paths and steps

- If you can walk but have difficulty with slopes, a handrail can provide additional support.
- If the path is steep, many people who have difficulty walking find one or two low steps easier to manage. If you use a walking aid, you need to consider if you will be able to lift the aid and ensure the steps are large enough for you to stand safely with a walking aid.

Steps and rails

- If you have difficulty managing steps, you may benefit from the support of rails. If there is only one step to your front door a simple grab rail in a vertical position on one or both sides of the door may be sufficient. If the height is more than 36cm, handrails are recommended. A grab rail needs to be positioned at a height that is comfortable for you.
- If you have more than one step, it is recommended that you use an external handrail. Depending on how much support you need, you may need a rail on one or both sides. This rail may be made of metal or wood but should provide insulation against the cold and should be slip resistant to the touch.
- If there is not a suitable fixing on the wall, for example if you have an outside porch, it may be possible to install a rail that is fixed to the top step instead of the wall. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) has produced a guide to planning and delivering home adaptations: 'Adaptations without delay'. It provides information that can help in the positioning of rails. This guide is intended for housing associations involved in fitting ‘minor adaptations’ for tenants, such as stair rails. It gives technical specifications and examples of good practice.

Size and dimensions of steps

It is always easier to manage if the height and depth of steps are of equal size. If your steps are uneven, having the steps changed to equal dimensions will make it easier and safer. It is also important to ensure that the steps do not have an overhang that could catch your feet. Recommendations on the dimensions for steps are given in Approved Document K (‘Protection from falling, collision and impact’) of The Building Regulations 2010.

Half steps

If you have a high step into your home, constructing an additional half step may help. It is important to ensure that these two steps are of equal height.

Visual access

It is important to ensure that a front entrance is easy to see/locate, especially for people who have any kind of sight loss or difficulties with memory or recognising their own front door. A clearly defined and labelled front entrance makes it easier to locate.

Factors to consider in helping to improve visual access:

- Good lighting can make it easier and safer to manage steps and to locate and operate a lock. It also helps you to be able to see visitors when you are answering the door.
- External lighting at the front door and to light steps, ramps or paths will makes it easier and safer when you are approaching your front door. This could be a light that comes on automatically when you approach the door and/or lights that come on automatically when the day light levels are low at different times of the day.
- Visual contrast makes it easier to locate your front entrance. This could include strong visual contrast between the door and the frame, the frame and the wall, or between the keyhole and lock and the door.
- Large and raised number plate that contrasts to the background.
- If there are steps a strip of lighter colour on the edge of the steps (for example white or yellow) will make it easier to see the shape and size of the steps.

Further reading: The Thomas Pocklington Trust has information about designing house entrances for people with visual impairment.

External Lifts

If you use a wheelchair and have steps to your front door but there is not enough room to install a ramp, you may need to install an external lift.

Considerations for external lifts:

- Is there sufficient space to install a lift?
- Will it obstruct access for ambulant users?
- Is the lift large enough to take your wheelchair?
- Is the lift large enough to take your wheelchair and an assistant?
- Do you need assistance to operate your wheelchair?
- Are you able to operate the controls?
- Does the lift fold out of the way when it is not in use?
- Can the lift be locked when it is not in use?
- Will you need to provide additional steps or access for other users?

External lifts have a platform that is large enough to accommodate a wheelchair and an assistant and have rails on two sides. They may also have integral steps. These move vertically and are useful for short rises, for example beside steps. Dependent on the space available, these lifts can be installed indoors as well as out.

There are a number of lifts available that can be fitted outside, either next to or on the steps:

- **Vertical lifts** include a platform that can accommodate a wheelchair. Some of these allow for enough space for an assistant (another person).
- **Inclined lifts** can have a platform that carries a wheelchair, or a seat to carry a person, like an internal stairlift.

There are two types of platform lifts:

- Short-rise platform lifts are suitable for shorter vertical lifts up to 1000mm
- Platform lifts that can travel longer vertical distances.

Short-rise lifts can be used indoors or outdoors where there is a change in levels, such as at a front step or split-level hallway. They have a platform large enough to accommodate a wheelchair. They may be open or enclosed on two or four sides. These lifts move vertically and are useful for short rises. Some short rise lifts can carry a wheelchair user and carer.

Inclined platform step lifts

These lifts are another option if there is no room for a vertical step lift. They are mounted on a track in a similar way to a stair lift and have a compact folding platform to support users.

Inclined chair step lifts

These lifts are like stair lifts but suitable for fitting outdoors. If you use a wheelchair for outdoors you will need to consider whether you have room to store a wheelchair or mobility scooter at ground level, or whether you need assistance to carry it down steps. If you are unable to do this, an inclined platform lift that will fit a wheelchair may be a better option.

When choosing a lift and which features best suits your needs, an individual assessment with an occupational therapist is strongly recommended.

Adapting entrances

In order to make it easier and safer to get in and out of your home, you may need adaptations to a front entrance and/or back entrance to garden, patio or balcony. If you live in a flat, you may need to request adaptations to a communal entrance.

Factors to consider when adapting an external entrance:

- If you have a porch, you may have to get through two doors: from the outside into the porch and then into the front door.
- If you have a small porch and both doors have high thresholds or steps, this may be difficult or impossible if you are using a wheelchair.
- Some people only use wheeled walking aids when walking outdoors and keep these in the porch. However, if this is in view from outside, this may be considered a security risk.

Opening the door

Opening a door, operating locks and handles can be difficult if you have:

- Limited strength, power and grip in your hands.
- Only have the use of one hand or limited reach.
- Sight loss.
- A door that is stiff or heavy to open.

When looking to make it easier to unlock and open your front door, consider the following:

- Can you get close enough to the door to open it from the inside and outside?
- Are you able to hold and turn a key?
- Are you able to reach and operate the door lock?
- Does the existing locking system require two hands to operate?
- Are you able to push the door open and close it behind you?
- Does the door swing closed before you have been able to get through it?

Holding and turning the key in the lock

If you have difficulty using a key due to limited strength in your hands, there are products that can be attached to keys to make it easier for you to hold and turn the key in the lock:

- Key turners fit to your existing key to extend the size and give you a more comfortable grip and better leverage.

Door handles

Many people find doorknobs difficult to turn. Lever door handles can be easier to operate and do not generally require a strong grip.

Replacing doors

If you are looking to replace doors, particularly security doors, be sure to try out the locking mechanism before purchase as some five liver locks require two movements (lifting the handle and turning of the key) which can be difficult to do.

Factors to consider when selecting door handles:

- Does the lock require you to lift the lever and if so, are you able to do this?
- Are you able to grip the handle?
- Can you operate the handle with the palm of your hand?
- Is your hand likely to slip off the end of the door handle?
- If your hand is likely to slip off when you are pushing a handle down to open it, then a door-knob turner may make it easier to operate. These fit onto existing doorknobs.
- Alternatively, you can replace the existing doorknob with a lever handle.

Automatic power-assisted door opening systems

If you are unable to reach or operate the lock with a conventional key or turn a door handle, or you are unable to get close enough to the door to open or close it, you may benefit from having an automatic opening door fitted.

Factors to consider when selecting an automatic opening door:

- Will the automatic opener be compatible with the locking system?
- Is there enough room for you to move away from the door swing?
- Can you hold and operate a handheld fob?
- Could the remote control be fixed to your wheelchair if you are unable to hold it? Do you need to operate the remote by suck or puff?
- How near do you need to be to the door for the remote control to work?
- Will the automatic opening be on a timer? (e.g. to stay open for a certain length of time then automatically close).
- Can you program the door to stay open? (e.g. if it is a back door and you want to leave it open in warm weather).
- How will the door be operated in the event of a power cut or fire?

Doors with controlled door closing

These doors are designed to automatically close after they have been manually opened. Many people who use wheelchairs or walking aids can find it difficult to push open these types of doors due to the 'spring shut' mechanism.

Free-swing door openers

If the door is too heavy for you to open, it may be possible to change the opener and hinges so that the door swings open freely. If you are living in a flat, you will need to check that this complies with fire regulations.

Door entry intercom system

If you have difficulty walking, it may take you some time to get to your front door. Many people benefit from having a door intercom system. There are a number of things you need to consider when selecting the right intercom system for you, as some models simply allow you to speak to the visitor or have video links so that you can see who the caller is. Some also allow you to remotely release the door lock to let them in. Some can be set up via an app and integrated with your smart phone or tablet.

When choosing a door entry intercom system also consider the following:

- If you require door release, what kind of door do you have? For example, if it's uPVC (plastic door and frame) you will need to ensure that the system is compatible with this type of door.
- Can you operate a wall-mounted handset, or would a portable handset be easier?
- What is the most convenient place to position the handset, and do you need more than one? (e.g. in your lounge, near to your armchair, in your bedroom next to your bed).
- Can you operate the buttons/switches on the handset?

Getting through the front door

You may have difficulty getting in and out of you front door if it is too narrow, heavy, or has a high threshold.

Thresholds

If you have difficulty walking, the threshold can present a trip hazard or an obstruction if you are using a walking aid or a wheelchair.

Accessible thresholds

The Building Regulations 2010, 'Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M', defines an accessible threshold as one where the total height does not exceed 15mm. It also recommends that any up stand or threshold greater than 5mm is chamfered (a curved profile) to ensure that a threshold is wheelchair accessible and could cause an obstruction or trip hazard.

Internal surfaces at the threshold such as thick doormats can impede wheelchair access or use of wheeled walking frames or walking aids. However, it may be important to have an effective low pile door mat to remove rainwater and/or dirt from the wheels of the wheelchair or walking aid.

Threshold types

How easy it is to lower or remove a threshold depend on the type of door:

- If you have a conventional timber door and frame, the threshold can be lowered or removed, and the existing door can be enlarged with an addition of a timber strip.
- If you have a uPVC or composite door, the whole frame will need to be replaced with one with a low threshold.

Weather protection

The function of thresholds at front entrances is to provide weather protection. If the threshold is lowered or made level, it is important to ensure that you make provision for weather protection. This can be done by:

- Installing a drain that provides a means for rainwater to soak away. There are a number of products available, but professional installation by a qualified contractor is advised.
- Ensuring there is a slight gradient sloping away from the entrance.
- There are a number of level threshold products that can be fitted to existing door sets or installed as new door sets, which ensure a weatherproof seal whilst providing a level or low threshold. It is important to ensure that these are Part M compliant.
- If you are a wheelchair user and/or have difficulty operating a lock and opening the door, it is worth considering whether it is feasible to construct a canopy above the door, to provide you with shelter while you are unlocking the door.

Threshold ramps

If you are using a wheelchair or are being assisted to use a wheelchair, a threshold ramp may make it easier if you are not able to lower or remove your threshold. Factors to consider when selecting a threshold ramp:

- How high is your threshold?
- Do you have sufficient space on both sides of the threshold to position the ramp?
- Is it possible to close the door with the threshold ramp in place?
- Do you need assistance to position the ramp each time you enter and leave your home and consider if a two-sided threshold ramp could be an option.
- How much does the threshold ramp weigh?
- How durable is it and can it be stored out of the way when not in use?
- Does it have a slip resistant surface?
- If you are purchasing the threshold ramp yourself, finding the best solution will depend on the dimensions of your threshold, the space available, and whether or not you can manage the slope with your wheelchair. If you are unsure of exactly what you need, some companies will provide a home demonstration service before you buy.
- Some local authority Adult Social Care or Children’s Occupational Therapy services provide threshold ramps free of charge, following an assessment of your needs.

Portable or removable ramps

N.B: If you think that a ramp would meet your needs, it is recommended that you seek an assessment to ensure the right piece of equipment is provided as portable/removable ramps can be particularly dangerous.

Contact your local Social Services or Children's Service to request a OT assessment or alternatively you could arrange a private OT assessment via the Royal College of Occupational Therapists' website

Factors to consider when planning to install or purchase ramp:

- What is the difference in levels between your entrance and the path?
- Is the path level and how steep will the ramp be?
- Is there enough space to create a level platform outside the door?

NB: If you do not use a wheelchair but have difficulty walking, you may find a ramp more difficult than steps.

There are different options for installation of ramps:

- Permanent.
- Semi-permanent/temporary. Usually made from reinforced plastic, steel or fiberglass.
- Modular. Usually more suitable for smaller and threshold ramps.

In order that ramps are as safe and easy as possible to use, it is recommended that the dimensions and gradient of the ramp complies with the following guidance:

- Building Regulations: Approved Document M (4) Access to and use of buildings Volume 1: Dwellings Category 2 and Category 3.
- Building Regulations: Approved Document K: Protection from falling, collision and impact.
- British Standard BS8300: 2 (2018) Design of An Accessible and Inclusive Built Environment 2018.

Surface of ramps and landings

The surface materials used for an external ramp should be durable, easy to maintain and slip-resistant when wet. Care should be taken on paths and ramps to remove any build-up of moss.

Semi-permanent ramps

A number of companies provide semi-permanent ramps.

Safety considerations:

- Although Building Regulations do not apply to semi-permanent ramps, it is important for safety reasons that the ramp complies with the recommended minimum dimensions.
- It is important to be aware of the risks (tipping/falling forwards/injury to assistants) to user and their assistants if the ramp does not comply with minimum standards.

To construct a ramp that will comply with building regulations, it is strongly advised that you select a contractor who is familiar with these requirements.

Getting around indoors

If you use any type of walking aid or wheelchair, you may have difficulty getting around your home. The level of difficulty can depend on the layout of your home, the width of the corridors and the clear opening width of doors. Getting from one room to another, if you are using a wheelchair, can be difficult if the space is limited.

The amount of space you need will depend on:

- The size of your wheelchair or walking aid.
- How easy it is for you to turn the wheelchair or walking aid.
- The size and layout of your home.
- Minimum guidance on widths of corridors and door opening widths for wheelchair access is given in 'The Building Regulations, 2010: Approved Document M, 'Access to and use of buildings'.

Removing obstacles and hazards

If you need to use walking equipment or a wheelchair, you will find that you require more space. In narrow hallways, radiators reduce available space, for example, and can make it difficult to manoeuvre.

- Floor coverings: If you have limited balance, or difficulty lifting your feet, loose rugs or carpets can hinder mobility and are trip hazards. Thick carpets can be more difficult to walk with a shuffling gait (footsteps) and are wheeling a frame or using a wheelchair.
- Re-arranging furniture: You may need to re-arrange furniture for easier unrestricted access around each room and to enable you to approach and reach key areas.
- Widening doors: Having the doors widened can make it easier to get around your home, particularly if you use a wheelchair to move around. When planning to widen a door it is important to know how much clear opening width you need. This means how much space you need to get through the door - for your wheelchair as well as your hands or elbows if you are propelling yourself. The clear opening width is the clear space between the face of the door and the doorstop. The minimum clear opening width you will need will also depend on the width of the corridor. Detailed guidance on recommended dimensions is given in Building Regulations (Part M) Volume 1: Dwelling M4(3) Wheelchair user dwellings.
- Door swing: It is important to be aware that if you are widening doors, you will also be enlarging the door swing (the amount of space the door swings into the room). This may create another obstacle. If the corridor or hall is wide enough and there is space available, a sliding door may be another option to save space.
- Sliding doors and pocket doors: Sliding doors can save space taken up by door swings. You will need to consider whether there is enough space (free of any obstructions including furniture) to slide the door along the wall so that the door can open fully. Some people have difficulty pulling or pushing sliding doors open. Also, those with memory or cognition issues may not recognise a sliding door. For example, they may have always used a swing opening door in the past.
- Pocket doors are sliding doors that slide into the wall space. Installation is more complex and will depend on the existing walls and how they are constructed. You are advised to seek technical advice before considering a pocket door.

Storage and charging space for wheelchairs

If you need to use a powered wheelchair or mobility scooter, you will need to consider how much space you need for storage and charging, and whether it needs to be stored indoors or outdoors. You also need to consider:

- If you are a full-time wheelchair user and totally reliant on a powered wheelchairs for all your mobility. You may need space next to the bed to store/charge your chair at night.
- If you only use a wheelchair for longer distances outdoors, and if you use a powered wheelchair, you will need space to store and charge it near to your front door
- Space requirements for storage and charging may vary according to the size and type of chair you need. Standard dimensions given in The Building Regulations 2010, Approved Document M for wheelchair accessibility are:

Powered wheelchairs: 1250mm x 750mm

Transit wheelchair (folded): 1000mm x 300mm

- Many people who use a wheelchair for all their mobility have a spare chair for use when their main chair needs repair. The storage space for the spare needs to be considered.
- A shelf for the wheelchair charger in the storage area will make it easier to operate. Recommended dimensions for size and position of shelf are:

Length: 500mm

Depth: 300mm

Bottom of shelf to finished floor level: 850mm

- When looking at space needed for a young child's wheelchair, it is best to allow for a full-sized adult chair to future-proof adaptations.

Circulation space for wheelchair users

- Most wheelchair users need a minimum of 1500mm clear turning circle in each room, so that they can enter and turn around and exit each room without needing to reverse.
- However, if you have a larger than standard wheelchair, or you need to use leg extensions or to have a tilting wheelchair, you will need more space than this.
- There are some powered wheelchairs available now that enable you to manage a smaller turning circle.
- Attendant-propelled wheelchairs will need a larger turning circle to accommodate the person pushing the chair.

Circulation space for people using walking frames or rollators

There is no specific guidance for people using walking frames or rollators. The amount of space you need will depend on:

- The width and depth of your walking frame or rollator.
- How easy it is for you to manoeuvre and turn your walking frame or rollator.
- If you have a wide walking frame, you can check with your provider/supplier if a narrower walking frame would provide you with sufficient support.

Getting up and down stairs

Depending on how safe it is for you to use the stairs, you may need to consider additional stair rails, or installing a stairlift or a through floor lift in your home. Children and those of short stature may find additional stair rails set below the standard rail height helpful.

Funding the provision of equipment

There are a few options available for funding of equipment and minor adaptations; this can vary across the UK. We provide an overview of the options available here, but it is worthwhile checking what arrangements are in place locally.

NHS/social services provision

Under the Care Act 2014, in England if you are assessed as requiring a minor home adaptation or preventative intervention **anything costing under £1,000** would be free of charge to you via your local authority.

In order to qualify for grants and local authority provision you will need to have a needs assessment. This which will determine whether you have eligible needs for care and support with daily living, due to age, disability or long-term health condition. You can get a needs assessment via your local authority's social services department. You can either apply yourself, or someone else can apply on your behalf, with your permission (such as a friend, relative or health professional). You can also get a referral from your GP.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

If the equipment or adaptation required costs **more than £1000**, you may be eligible to apply for a Disabled Facility Grant to pay for home adaptations. If the work is 'reasonable and practicable' and 'necessary to meet the needs' of a person with a disability. This can include extensions and structural work to accommodate fixed hoists, stairlifts, downstairs bathrooms, shower units etc. You can apply for a grant of up to £30,000 in England, up to £36,000 in Wales and up to £25,000 in Northern Ireland. Conditions for DFGs will vary according to the country in which you live.

To apply for a DFG for housing adaptations your needs will be assessed by an occupational therapist. They usually come to your home to assess your needs, and this can include a joint assessment together with you and any carer you may have. They can also do assessments over the phone. They will then contact the relevant council departments with any necessary evidence they have gathered that the work proposed is appropriate and meets all the requirements for funding.

Age UK has a factsheet ('Factsheet 41. How to get care and support') explaining more about the DFG process.

Disability Rights UK has some very comprehensive online information about Disabled Facilities Grants and other housing grants.

NB - Please note that you may not receive any grant if you start work on your property before the council approves your application.

- The money helper website has some useful information about funding for adaptations.
- You may also like to see our factsheet about planning and funding adaptations to your home.

It is recommended that you seek advice from an occupational therapist before considering which equipment is suitable to you. You may be entitled to an assessment by an NHS local authority social services occupational therapist. Alternatively, if you are self-funding, a list of independent occupational therapists can be found on The Royal College of Occupational Therapists' website.

Private purchase

- If you need advice before you buy, contact your local equipment demonstration centre where you would have the opportunity to try out a range of equipment. There are several of these around the country where you can go for impartial advice. Your local authority will also be able to supply information about where your nearest centre is located. Also disabled living centres and some retailers have showrooms which have areas set up so you can try out items of equipment to see if they will suit you before you commit to making a purchase.
- If you are unsure if you can afford the equipment or any of the associated costs, requesting an assessment or advice from an occupational therapist or local well-being service (local areas may have different titles for support services) will help with decision-making. It may be that another way of accessing equipment is more suitable for you.
- Also consider if you can afford a service contract for more complex items of equipment. These may seem expensive at first, but in the long run call out costs or replacements may prove to be costly. Some items such as hoists and slings need to be 'LOLER' (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations, 1998) checked. This is because they are used to move people mechanically and these checks are a legal requirement every six months. Others with moving parts or electrics will have a service schedule recommended by the manufacturer which is included in the instruction manual.
- Before purchasing, look for a sales company that belongs to a trade association, such as the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA). BHTA members have signed up to a code of practice governing standards of customer service.
- Some suppliers will fit equipment, but some is sold 'supply only'. Finding a tradesman to fit items may not be easy. There may be a local arrangement for fitting small items such as a care and repair service or Home Improvement Agency or there may be a list of 'trusted traders' provided. Websites such as Checkatrade provide feedback from previous customers which can help you find a reputable service provider and Trading Standards may be able to advise if there are concerns over a company you are considering using.

VAT exempt purchases

- Equipment which is specifically designed for those with disabilities may be purchased 'VAT free'. This is not claimed back via the personal tax system/HMRC, but during your purchase. If you have purchased something which should have been VAT free, it is not possible to claim this back from the supplier or HMRC.
- Equipment suppliers may have the VAT exemption form on their website, or you can download a general form from the GOV.UK website. You will need to fill in a form for each supplier you use, but you will only need to do this for the first purchase with them.

Charitable funding

- If you do not have the funds to buy equipment, it may be possible to request support from a charity. They will usually have criteria which they will apply, and most will not consider equipment which should be provided by the NHS or social services.
- Some charities will only consider requests which are supported by an involved professional, usually an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or a nurse. This may require them to be present during the assessment for an item of equipment. This is to ensure that the equipment is appropriate and will not have an impact on planned treatment or rehabilitation programmes.
- Equipment is not always purchased outright and gifted to you. Some items are provided on loan, either for a specified length of time, or to be returned when no longer needed or appropriate.

A number of charity websites that may offer funding are listed here:

- Turn2Us - A national charity that helps people in financial hardship gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services.
- Scope - A disability equality charity in England and Wales.
- Sense - A charity supporting people who are deafblind or who have complex disabilities.
- Friends of the Elderly - A charity who run a Grant Giving Programme for older people in financial need.

Prescriptions

Following assessment, some local authorities may issue a prescription for equipment. This can be taken to a local retailer (usually a pharmacy or independent retailer), and you can collect the equipment to be used, or the equipment may be delivered to your home.

Equipment hire

If your need is short-term, it may be cost effective to hire equipment.

Mobility Hire is a national source for mobility and assistive equipment on hire or purchase. They offer short or long-term rental solutions to meet most requirements, and equipment ranges from bathroom aids to wheelchairs.

If the equipment is required for a holiday, it is advisable to look for a supplier near to your destination as they will be able to respond to any issues such as a breakdown/breakage.

Community equipment store loan

This is available via an NHS employee (nurse/occupational therapist or physiotherapist) or via a social services Occupational Therapy service.

Loans can either be short-term to assist after an operation or illness, or longer term to promote independence or support caregiving.

Long-term loans are usually the responsibility of social services (Adult Social Care/Children's Services) and will be provided following an assessment by an occupational therapist. Straightforward items, such as raised toilet seats or bath seats and boards can be provided by an occupational therapy assistant.

Arrangements vary across the UK, and you may find that local arrangements allow different services to provide equipment on behalf of each other.

Equipment may be offered as an alternative to an adaptation. Your occupational therapist will explain why they are making this suggestion.

NB - equipment from social services is provided for use at your home address and should not be used elsewhere as:

1. It is assessed as suitable for use in your home and selected to work within your existing environment and current equipment.
2. They will not be able to respond to breakdowns or repairs.

However, if you are permanently moving home into the area of another local authority, you can take the equipment with you if you still need to use it and it is the most cost-effective solution. You will need to discuss this with the service that issued the equipment to you.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Attendance Allowance

Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Attendance Allowance are benefits available for those who need support with activities of daily living. More information is available from the government and Citizens Advice, enabling you to check your eligibility if you are not already claiming one of these benefits.

Further advice from us

Living Made Easy

For clear, practical advice and information on **products and suppliers of daily living equipment**, please have a look at our Living Made Easy website which is the largest aids to daily living database in Europe.

AskSARA

If you would like help **choosing equipment for everyday living** you could try our online self-assessment tool, AskSARA.

AskSARA is an award-winning online self-help guide providing expert advice and information on products and equipment for older and disabled people. The tool will ask you questions about yourself and your environment and then offer relevant advice, product suggestions and supplier details. AskSARA is licensed for use through local authorities, and you can check if your local authority provides access to AskSARA here: https://asksara.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/about-ask-sara.

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