

AGE
Concern

Adapting your home

Your guide to services
and equipment

clear,
helpful
advice

revised,
updated



free guide

your health and home

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The four national Age Concerns in the UK have joined together with Help the Aged to form new national charities dedicated to improving the lives of older people.

This guide is not a comprehensive statement of the law in this subject and Age Concern and Help the Aged cannot give individual legal or financial advice. The information given in this guide is applicable in the UK but in some instances different arrangements apply in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Some rules may have changed since the publication of this guide. If you have any queries which this guide does not answer, seek further advice from one of the organisations suggested.

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Introduction

As you get older you may find it harder to manage in your home, perhaps because of health problems, disability or bereavement. However, you may be able to stay in your home for longer if it is adapted to meet your needs.

This guide looks at the types of adaptations and equipment that are available and how to obtain them. It also suggests small practical steps that can make a difference to your quality of life.

Throughout this guide you will find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section.

► **pages 21–23** Contact details for local organisations can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age Concern should be able to help. ► **page 21**



The information given in this guide is applicable in the UK but in some instances different arrangements apply in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Readers in those countries are advised to contact their national Age Concern organisations for further information.

► **page 21**

- 6 **When I retired we discussed moving, but we both wanted to stay in our present home. However, I now find it increasingly difficult to climb the stairs to the first-floor toilet because of the arthritis in my hips and knees... 9**

Access to your home

This advice relates to both your main access, generally the front door, and your rear or garden access. If you are having difficulty getting in and out of your property there are ways to make it easier.

If you have difficulty climbing the steps leading to your front door, you could have a rail installed. This could either be a galvanised rail attached to the ground (usually set into concrete), which may be up to a few metres long, or a smaller grab rail at the door to help you step over the threshold safely.

If you are a wheelchair user, you may need to have a ramp installed to enable you to reach the front door. This may require alterations to the porch or front step. Ramps have to meet a number of design rules to ensure that they offer a safe means of access in all weather conditions.

A portable ramp may be appropriate where there is a small step and where there is someone present who can install and then remove the ramp after use.

Sometimes it is not safe or practical to install a ramp, particularly if there isn't enough space around the door. A wheelchair lift may be an alternative in these circumstances.

what
next?

Contact your local authority social services department to find out what assistance is available with adaptations to help you access your home.

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Answering the door

If you have difficulty getting to the front door when someone calls, you could consider installing a door-entry intercom. This can either be one where you talk to the visitor via an intercom link and then walk to the front door or where you press a button to open the door from your sitting position after you have spoken to the visitor via the intercom.

There are other options to allow friends, relatives and carers access if you find it difficult to get to the front door in time to answer it. One of these is a key safe, where the key is held in a secure box that can only be opened by someone who knows the code.

In any situation that involves changing the way visitors access your property, the most important considerations are safety and security. These issues should be thoroughly investigated before you make any changes.

what
next?

Disabled Living Centres stock a wide range of products that you can try to see if they might be useful.

▶ page 22

- 6 **My friend used to come round every day for a chat and make sure I was alright. I really enjoyed that but then, after I had a fall, I found it difficult to get to the front door in time. So I asked the local authority to make an assessment of my needs and as a result a door-release intercom has been fitted. I can now speak to visitors when they call to find out who they are and then open the door while I'm sitting in my lounge. ●**

Moving around your home

If you are having difficulty moving around a property, think about the risks related to floor surfaces, lighting, clutter and trip hazards such as exposed wires.

If you use a wheelchair, do you have enough room to manoeuvre your chair around each room and from room to room? If the ability to turn from a corridor into a room is inhibited by the door and corridor width, it may be possible to widen the door frame or to re-hang the door so that it swings in the opposite direction and does not block the way. In some circumstances walls can be removed or re-sited to provide a larger turning circle in a room.

If you need all your essential facilities to be on one floor you could consider creating an extension to your home. This may require planning permission from the local authority. It is advisable to seek the advice of a qualified professional, such as a surveyor or an architect, to confirm the safety and appropriateness of any major adaptations to property.

what
next?

Contact Age Concern for a free leaflet called *Home safety checker*. ► [page 21](#)



Getting up and down stairs

If the facilities in your property – your toilet, bathroom, kitchen – are on different floors you may be finding it increasingly difficult to keep using the stairs.

It may be possible to install a second banister rail on the stairs or to fit a stairlift to make it easier for you to get up and down the stairs. A stairlift is a mechanical seat or platform that runs up and down a rail attached to the stairs. There are a number of different types on the market, with a range of features to suit different needs. They may have:

- a seat designed to help you get safely on and off
- user-friendly controls
- safety features to make sure the stairlift stops if something or someone blocks its movement.

If your needs cannot be met with a second banister rail or a stairlift, it may be possible to install a through-floor wheelchair lift. These lifts enable wheelchair users to move between floors in their chairs. They are usually large pieces of equipment and may take up quite a lot of space. The size and layout of your home will affect what adaptations are possible.

what
next?

Ricability produces a range of consumer guides with practical information on choosing products for older and disabled people. ► [page 22](#)

Getting up and dressed

Getting in and out of bed, or up from a chair, becomes difficult for many older people. If you are in this situation you will find that the height of a piece of furniture strongly affects how easy it is to get on and off. Items called raisers can be fitted to beds and chairs to increase their height.

You can also get powered riser-recliner chairs and specialist beds that raise the user into a position where they can stand or lower the user into a sitting or lying position.

If you feel you are at risk of pressure sores or other related conditions ask your GP or district nurse for an assessment of your pressure-care issues. This may be because you are sitting or lying in one position for a long period of time.

If you need a carer to help you get up there are also various types of equipment designed to help with turning, lifting and transferring from one setting to another, such as hoists, transfer boards and slide sheets. Training should be provided before anyone uses equipment of this kind to avoid injury to you or the person moving you.

For getting dressed there is equipment such as a long-handled shoehorn, implements to assist with putting on tights and socks, and hooks to assist with doing up buttons. There are also various types of easy-reach grabbers to help you pick up items that may have fallen to the floor.

what
next?

Contact your local authority social services department to request an assessment of your needs and for information about sources of assistance in your area.

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Washing, bathing and using the toilet

Loss of mobility and balance can make it increasingly difficult to wash and bathe or to use the toilet in a standard bathroom. If you are finding this there is a range of equipment and adaptations that may be of use.

Bath lifts of varying designs are available to make it easier for you to get in and out of the bath. These usually consist of a seat or platform that can be raised or lowered to support your weight as you get in and out and allow you to sit in the bath to wash. There are also baths that have a door so you can enter without having to climb over the side. Depending on your needs it may be better to remove the bath altogether and install a 'wet room' or level-access shower, which often have a wall-attached seat to assist those who cannot stand for long periods.

Other items in the bathroom can also be tailored to meet your needs. A wall-mounted sink may allow you to get closer and wash more comfortably if you are a wheelchair user. This and other facilities can be set at the right height for someone who is in a wheelchair or using a mobile shower seat.

If you are unable to clean yourself after using the toilet, 'hands free' toilets are available that include a washing and drying function while you are still seated. In many houses, toilets are sited in small, narrow rooms, which can be inaccessible. It may be necessary to move the toilet or create one toilet/bathroom with enough space for you to move around safely and comfortably.

what
next?

Contact the Disabled Living Foundation for details of equipment available to make life easier in the bathroom and toilet. ► page 22

In the kitchen

There are various pieces of equipment that can assist with preparing and consuming food and drink.

If you have difficulty standing to prepare food you could use a perching stool, which is designed to allow a near-standing position but supports you at the same time. If you can only use one hand or find it hard to grip or carry, there are tools such as spike boards to allow one-handed vegetable peeling, kettle tippers, wide-handled cutlery, tap turners, non-slip table mats, high-rimmed plates, two-handled cups and assistive tin, bottle and jar openers. A sturdy trolley can provide support for mobility as well as allowing the movement of food and drink from room to room.

If you require a wheelchair-accessible kitchen it may be necessary to install adjustable-height work surfaces with adequate space underneath to allow the correct position for carrying out tasks. A shallow basin and draining board with space left underneath can allow kitchen tasks to be carried out independently from a wheelchair and cupboards of accessible height with internal shelving that can be pulled forward could also be useful.

what
next?

Contact the Disabled Living Foundation for details of equipment to make life easier in the kitchen.

► [page 22](#)

Living with sight problems

Most of us experience some degree of loss of sight as we get older. It is important to have your eyes tested regularly to identify any deterioration in their condition as soon as possible. Some sight loss cannot be corrected but a combination of practical steps and special equipment can help to reduce the impact on your independence.

Loose wires and carpets, broken handrails or general clutter can be a hazard if you cannot see them. Ask family or friends to help you repair and tidy. Alternatively, contact your local Age Concern to see if they have a handyman scheme that can help with minor jobs.

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Increasing the levels of natural light entering your home helps to make the most of your sight. You should also check whether your artificial lighting is appropriate for your needs. Could the colour scheme in your home be changed to make things easier to see? Use coloured tape to differentiate the edges of stairs and other borders.

There are lots of aids and gadgets available to help people with sight problems. These include raised markings for appliance controls, clocks with high-contrast or tactile faces and telephones with large, clearly marked buttons. The RNIB provides in-depth information on what is available, how to get hold of items and lots of practical advice on living with sight problems.

what
next?

Contact the RNIB for further information on what you can do to manage the impact of sight loss in your day-to-day life. ► [page 23](#)

Living with hearing loss

Most people will also experience some degree of hearing loss as they grow older. If you are one of them, there is a wide range of equipment available to help. Devices to alert you, such as door bells and smoke alarms, are particularly important in the home. Versions of these are available that use strobe lights or vibrating pads to get your attention.

Telephones are an important way of keeping in touch with people and of summoning help in an emergency. There are voice- and text-based telephone options available for people with hearing loss. What works best for you will depend on your needs.

what
next?

Contact RNID for information about these and other types of products available for people with hearing loss. ► page 23

Dual sensory impairment

Many older people experience loss of both sight and hearing. For information on the particular issues raised by dual sensory impairment, or deafblindness, and suggestions on how to maintain independence contact Sense, a national charity working in this field.

► page 23

New technology

Technological developments are continually offering us new ways to live our lives and interact with one another. One example of this is 'telecare', which allows remote monitoring of people in their own homes to help with managing risk and promote independent living.

The most well-known example of this is the community alarm (see below) but others include a fall detector, epilepsy sensor, chair and occupancy sensor, flood detector, gas leak valve shut-off sensor and a property exit sensor.

There are also telehealth products that monitor a person's health. For example, the correct dose of tablets to be dispensed on a daily basis can be pre-set and monitored.

Community alarms

Community alarms enable people living by themselves to summon help in the event of a fall or other accident. There are a number of different systems on the market but usually you have a pendant or other transmitter to keep with you. If the alarm is triggered your family or friends will be notified. The local authority may provide alarms to some people.

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what
next?

Contact the Disabled Living Foundation for a factsheet on community alarms. ► [page 22](#)



case
study

Carol is the main carer for her husband Fred...

- 6 Recently I've found there are some things I can't do as well as I used to, which is a worry as I care for my husband. My daughter suggested that we visit a local centre which demonstrates disability equipment. There was lots of useful stuff there. I'd been having trouble lifting the kettle to pour water from it – now we've got a cradle so I can tip it up without taking the weight.
- 6 We've also been looking at equipment to make things easier for both of us. I can't really help to support his weight as he gets in and out of the bath anymore. We asked the local authority if we qualified for any help and they sent an occupational therapist round. He was very helpful and has suggested we get some grab rails and a bath seat. The local authority is going to arrange these and they should be fitted next month. ●

Help from the local authority

Contact your local authority social services department if you want help with finding out about and paying for the provision of disability equipment and adaptations. Most older people are eligible for an assessment of their needs. If you have a carer, they are entitled to be included in the assessment, and they are also entitled to an assessment in their own right.

You will be assessed either by a care manager or an occupational therapist (OT), depending on the level of your needs. The local authority will have eligibility criteria that identify the help they will provide for particular needs. This may include equipment, adaptations and practical support with domestic tasks and personal care, all intended to help you carry on living independently in your home for as long as possible.

Some equipment and smaller adaptations are provided free of charge. ► [page 16](#) For larger adaptations, the local authority may assist you in applying for a grant from the housing department. ► [page 17](#)

If you do not qualify for assistance from the local authority, or prefer not to use them, similar services may be available through private agencies or local voluntary organisations.

what
next?

Social services' telephone number should be in your local phone book. Contact the main local authority switchboard or your local Age Concern if you have difficulty finding it. ► [page 20](#)

Help with the costs of equipment and minor adaptations

All community equipment and adaptations costing less than £1000 are provided and fitted free of charge if the local authority has assessed you as needing them. These can include small works such as a grab rail, short ramps, dropped curbs, lever taps, and internal and external lighting.

This type of adaptation will usually be recommended by an occupational therapist following an assessment visit. Its main advantage is that it can be carried out relatively promptly to meet urgent needs, unlike a Disabled Facilities Grant-funded adaptation, which may take months to process and complete.

The Government intends to integrate the provision of equipment and adaptations into personal and individual budgets, a new way of funding care services that is being introduced in local authorities.

“ I was having problems because I live alone and could not turn the taps in my kitchen and bathroom. Following an assessment, the existing taps have been replaced with lever taps. The whole process took less than one month and was free of charge. It has made such a difference! ”

what
next?

Contact your local Age Concern ► [page 20](#) for information about sources of assistance in your area or you can contact your local authority social services department directly. ► [page 15](#)

Disabled Facilities Grants

For larger adaptations (costing more than £1000) the main source of financial assistance is a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). DFGs can be used to cover a wide range of adaptation works that would enable you to get in and out, move around and use the facilities in your home.

The grant is paid by the local authority housing department, but the social services department is the first point of contact when applying. A DFG will usually only be paid for work that a local authority occupational therapist has assessed you as needing to have done. The application must also be approved by the housing department. The local authority has a mandatory duty to provide DFG funding in certain circumstances.

Both home owners and tenants can apply for a DFG. The grant is means-tested and your savings and capital may affect how much funding you are awarded. There is also an upper limit on the amount that can be awarded in a grant, although local authorities may agree to top this up in some circumstances.

what
next?

Contact your local authority social services department or housing department for information about applying for a DFG. Social services' telephone number should be in your local phone book. Contact the main local authority switchboard or your local Age Concern if you have difficulty finding it. ► page 20

Home Improvement Agencies

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) (sometimes called Care and Repair or Staying Put) are not-for-profit organisations that help people who are older, disabled or on low incomes to repair, improve or adapt their homes. They assist homeowners and private tenants. Council tenants should contact their local housing office to request an adaptation or to report a maintenance issue.

HIA schemes usually offer practical help with tasks such as arranging a survey, getting estimates for the work, applying for local authority assistance (including Disabled Facilities Grants) and/or loans and supervising the work to completion.

Some HIAs run a 'handyperson' scheme that provides help with small repairs. These may reduce risk in the home, for example fitting rails to prevent falls, and improve safety, security, and energy efficiency. Even if you can afford to pay for the work yourself, you can take a lot of the worry out of organising it by using a HIA.

If there is no HIA in your area, the local authority may run a handyperson scheme of its own. Schemes are also often run by other organisations and local charities such as Age Concern.

what
next?

To find out whether there is a HIA in your area, contact your local Age Concern, ► page 20 your local authority housing department or Foundations – the national coordinating body for Home Improvement Agencies. ► page 22

Other ways of funding adaptations

If you need funds for repairs and improvements to your house, it is advisable to check first if your local authority can help you. You may find you are not eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant following the means test or you may be asked to make a significant contribution to the cost of eligible works. You may also wish to adapt your home without using the services of the local authority. In these cases you may wish to contact a Home Improvement Trust.

Home Improvement Trusts ► [page 22](#) operate the Houseproud scheme in partnership with local authorities to help older homeowners release some of the equity tied up in their home to fund repairs, improvements and adaptations. This enables older homeowners to obtain extra capital and/or income from their homes while continuing to live there. Before you commit yourself to this type of scheme you should take independent financial and legal advice.

There may be charities or trust funds that can help with the cost of smaller repair work.

what
next?

Contact the Age Concern Information Line for further information on equity release schemes and sources of financial help. ► [page 20](#)

Moving to more suitable accommodation

If you have difficulty managing in your home and it is not possible to adapt it, it may be necessary to move to alternative accommodation. You may also wish to be closer to your relatives or friends.

There are different options but your choice may be determined by your current housing or financial situation. For example, if you are a council or housing association tenant, you may apply for a transfer to sheltered accommodation, and if you are a homeowner you may consider selling your home and simply downsizing or purchasing specialist retirement accommodation.

Talk about your plans with friends and family and/or get independent advice. If you have a disability, it may be appropriate to request an assessment by the local authority to help you with your re-housing needs. This type of assessment generally involves an occupational therapist visiting your property, after which they will write a report with specific recommendations for your re-housing needs. The report will be for your use and also, if appropriate, for the use of the local authority or housing association.

what
next?

Contact Age Concern for the free information guide *Choices in retirement housing*. ► [page 20](#)

Useful organisations

Age Concern

For more information and details for your local Age Concern in England, please call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk



In Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, contact:

Age Concern Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9032 5055

Website: www.ageconcernni.org

Scottish Helpline for Older People (Age Concern Scotland)

Tel: 0845 125 9732

Websites:

www.olderpeoplescotland.org.uk

www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk

Age Concern Cymru

Tel: 029 2043 1555

Website: www.accymru.org.uk

Help the Aged

Produces a range of free advice materials for older people and runs SeniorLine, a telephone information service.

Tel: 0808 800 6565 (SeniorLine)

Tel: 020 7278 1114 (information materials)

Website: www.hta.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

National network of free advice centres. For details of your local CAB call 020 7833 2181 (this number gives local contact details only, not advice).

Websites:

www.citizensadvice.org.uk for local CAB details

www.adviceguide.org.uk for online information

Disabled Living Centres

Provide advice, information and demonstrations of a range of disability equipment at local showrooms.

To find your nearest centre, contact **Assist UK**:

Tel: 0870 770 2866

Website: www.assist-uk.org

Disabled Living Foundation

Runs an equipment demonstration centre, provides information about equipment for daily living.

Tel: 0845 130 9177

Website: www.dlf.org.uk

Foundations

National coordinating body for Home Improvement Agencies in England. You can search for your nearest agency on the website.

Tel: 01457 891909

Website: www.foundations.uk.com

Home Improvement Trust, The

Runs the Houseproud scheme to provide information to older and disabled people on funding major works on their homes.

Tel: 0800 783 7569 (free call)

Website: www.houseproud.org.uk

Ricability

A national research charity dedicated to providing independent information of value to disabled and older consumers.

Tel: 020 7427 2460

Website: www.ricability.org.uk

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

National charity offering information and support for deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Information line: 0808 808 0123 (free call)

Information line textphone: 0808 808 9000 (free call)

Text message: 07800 000360

Website: www.rnid.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

National organisation offering information and support for blindness and visual impairment.

Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Sense

National organisation offering information and support to those with dual sensory impairment (deafblindness).

Tel: 0845 127 0060

Text message: 0845 127 0062

Website: www.sense.org.uk



please support us

Age Concern is the largest provider of services to older people in the UK after the NHS. We make a difference to the lives of thousands of older people through local resources such as our befriending schemes, day centres and lunch clubs and through our national freephone helpline – the Age Concern Information Line.

If you would like to support our work by making a donation please call Supporter Services on 020 8765 7527 (Monday to Friday 9.15am–5pm) or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk
Thank you.

What should I do now?

If you would like more information on the issues covered in this guide, to order other guides or obtain this guide in a more accessible format, please call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or visit www.ageconcern.org.uk/information

The following Age Concern information guides may also be useful:

- *Help with care in your home*
- *Home safety checker*
- *Save more, pay less*
- *Your health services.*

Age Concern publishes a range of books on issues relevant to older people. Browse our online bookshop at www.ageconcern.org.uk/bookshop

Contact details for your local Age Concern may be in the box below. If not, call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 (free call).

Age Concern is a federation of registered charities. Age Concern England (charity number 261794) has merged with Help the Aged (charity number 272786) to form Age UK, a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England: registered office address 207–221 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ, company number 6825798, registered charity number 1128267. Age Concern and Help the Aged are brands of Age UK. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI, Age Cymru.