

Information sheet C16 – equipment for independent living

The range of equipment available to make life easier for people who have difficulty with daily tasks is increasing all the time. A growing range of items are available from high street shops; others can be found in specialist shops or catalogues, or on the internet. Health and care professionals can give you advice about equipment which might help you, and supplier catalogues. They can also arrange the loan of any equipment which is necessary for your care and support plan, or which will reduce the need for you to rely on support from other people.

■ What kinds of equipment are available?

There is equipment which can help with almost any task which might be difficult as a result of illness or disability, or while you are recovering from treatment or surgery. Browsing in shops, catalogues or websites, you may find clever solutions to problems which you thought you just had to put up with. These are just some examples of what is available:

- Grabbers to help you pick things up from the floor, and devices to make it easy to put your socks on, if it's difficult for you to bend down
- Kitchen utensils with easy-to-grip handles, baskets which go inside a pan so there's no need to lift it when it's full of boiling water, or openers for jars and cans
- Equipment which makes tasks easier if your sight or hearing is causing problems, such as lights that flash when someone presses the doorbell or phones you, vibrating pillow alarms, or devices which beep when a cup is nearly full
- Devices which prompt you if you sometimes forget medication, such as boxes for pills with a compartment for each day of the week, or automatic pill dispensers, which can be programmed to alert you and give you the right pills at the right times.

You can get impartial advice about what equipment you might find useful from Disability North East, The Dene Centre, Castle Farm Road, Gosforth, Newcastle NE3 1PH – Telephone (0191) 284 0480 for an appointment – Text Direct – 18001 0191 284 0480 – Email reception@disabilitynorth.org.uk – web address – www.disabilitynorth.com

Support groups and voluntary organisations for people with your particular health condition or disability may be able to offer particularly useful advice.

For larger and more expensive equipment, it is usually best to ask for advice from an occupational therapist.

■ Where can I find equipment to buy?

Listings of private companies offering equipment and advice can also be found in telephone directories, such as Thompson's or the Yellow Pages, and through using internet search engines. Some examples are:

- Argos - www.argos.co.uk – Mobility aids, bathing equipment, toileting equipment, Personal aids, Tables and Trolleys
- Boots - www.boots.com – Mobility and daily living aids
- Lloyds Pharmacy - www.lloydspharmacy.com – Mobility and daily living aids
- Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk) can deliver a wide range of equipment – try the search term "disability aids" on their website

- OT stores – www.otstores.co.uk - 0845 260 7061 or info@otstores.co.uk
- www.essentialaids.com - 01273 719889 or contact@essentialaids.com
- www.nrshealthcare.co.uk – 0345 121 8111
- Ability Superstore - www.abilitysuperstore.com; 0800 255 0498 or 0161 85 00 884
- Peacocks (www.northeastfootcentre.co.uk) - 1 St Thomas Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4LE - Telephone 0191 232 7894

Inclusion of companies in the list above does not constitute an endorsement of their products or services.

■ Help from the NHS and the Council

If you are in contact with health or social care staff, you can ask them whether equipment would help you to be more independent. Otherwise you can phone our OneCall phone number to talk about your needs, on 01670 536400. We will discuss with you whether you would benefit from specific advice about equipment or a broader assessment of your care and support needs.

We may be able to loan you equipment free of charge. We will offer to loan you equipment if we think this will prevent, reduce or delay the need for you to get care and support from other people to carry out key daily living tasks. For instance this could mean avoiding the need for family members to help you to get up in the morning, or reducing the level of support that you need from home care workers.

We will also loan without charge any equipment which is needed to provide care and support which we have assessed that you need – for instance if home care workers need equipment to be able to lift you safely.

■ Our equipment service

Loan equipment comes from our Joint Equipment Loans Service (JELS), which is operated by the Council and funded jointly with the NHS. JELS aim to deliver common items of equipment within ten working days – unusual or specialist items, or equipment which has to be customised for each person may take longer. JELS delivery vans travel regularly to all areas of the County; and JELS will make contact before the delivery of equipment to check that you will be in or make other arrangements.

The van drivers can set up and show people how to use some lower risk equipment and how to care for it. For everything else you should not use the equipment until you have had it demonstrated to you by a health or social care professional, who will also show you how to care for and clean the equipment.

If there is a problem with the equipment or it is no longer required, you should first contact either your care manager or the professional who ordered the equipment for you. If you have difficulty in getting someone to resolve the problem, you can contact JELS on (01670) 730 595.