

**Making your home
a better place to live
with chronic, obstructive
pulmonary disease
(COPD), asthma and
other respiratory
diseases**



Who is the guide for?

This guide is for older people with chronic, obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma and other respiratory diseases and their carers.

It focuses on the impact of respiratory diseases on daily living at home aiming to make life easier so that you can continue to live independently and do the things you want to do.

It is also aimed at informing organisations providing a range of services for older people and points them in the direction of simple, and often low-cost, adaptations that can make a big difference to people's lives, as well as signposting to the organisations that can help.

Separate guides are available for people with other health conditions. These will be helpful for those who may have several long-term conditions. There is also a guide for people with dementia.

<https://silverlinksprogramme.wordpress.com/resources-for-older-people/>

By making the home safer to negotiate the lives of carers too can be made significantly easier.

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How can this guide help you or a family member?

If you or your partner or family member have been diagnosed with COPD, asthma or other respiratory disease there are several things you could do to improve your home environment so as to enjoy life and live life to the full.

These ideas can be considered whether you stay in your current home or move to specialist or supported housing.

They include considerations about:

- general design and layout to support a good life at home
- lighting and heating
- safety, security and technology
- gadgets and equipment
- going out and about.

Where appropriate there is a link to further advice. There is also a section on moving options should this be an option you want to consider.

Symptoms of COPD, asthma and other respiratory diseases

One factor common to these respiratory diseases is a narrowing of the airways which impact on ability to breathe.

COPD This term describes the condition where someone has both chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) leads to damaged airways in the lungs, meaning these become narrower and so make it harder to get air to pass in and out (i.e. to breathe). The condition is called 'chronic' because it is a long term, ongoing condition.

- **In chronic bronchitis**, inflammation of the tubes within the lungs causes the body to produce too much mucus, resulting in phlegm build up and coughing.
- **In the case of emphysema**, the airways become narrower, less air (and hence oxygen) can enter into the lungs, and the person may become quite breathless.

Asthma This is caused by something irritating the airways, making them tighten and causing difficulties in breathing. What causes the irritation varies from person to person, but can include:

- pets
- pollen
- house dust mites
- moulds and fungi
- the weather or the indoor environment.

For some people, an asthma attack can be triggered by emotions - for example, becoming very upset, or even laughing. An asthma attack can happen very quickly, and the person's breathing may be noticeably laboured. But with the right support, some changes and adaptations, most people with can and do continue to enjoy living independently at home.

For further details of COPD and other respiratory conditions contact The British Lung Foundation www.lunguk.org

For asthma contact Asthma UK www.asthma.org.uk

There are also other specialist charities offering information about other conditions that affect breathing such as the Cystic Fibrosis Trust www.cftrust.org.uk



A common concern for people with COPD, asthma and other respiratory diseases is that difficulties in breathing will restrict their ability to do daily tasks and may make it increasingly difficult for them to live independently at home. But with the right support and with some simple design and layout changes many people with arthritis can and do enjoy living in their own homes for the rest of their lives.

Our aim in this guide is to offer options to minimise impact so that you can live comfortably and well at home. For ease of reference we have identified changes that focus on: -

- general mobility
- dealing with strain and breathlessness
- improving safety
- keeping warm.

Financial help with repairs, improvements and adaptations to your home

If you are on a limited income and have been affected by conditions that restrict your movement or make it difficult or unsafe to move about your home, you may be entitled to some help with repairs, adaptations and equipment in your home.

A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) is available from the local council if you are eligible and there may be other housing grants available. DFG pays for essential home adaptations and is mandatory and means tested. The maximum grant is £30,000 with average grants of £6,500. Some councils will have smaller grants for essential repairs or heating but this varies locally so you need to contact your local council to find out what is available.

Disability Rights UK at <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/housing-grants?onOff=OFF>

Age UK at

http://www.ageuk.org.uk/BrandPartnerGlobal/portsmouthVPP/Documents/FS13%20Funding%20repairs,%20improvements%20and%20adaptations%20July%202010_fcs.pdf and

http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Factsheets/FS42_Disability_equipment_and_home_adaptations_fcs.pdf?dtrk=true



The home and garden

How safe or otherwise is your home?

One idea is to check your home room by room, as well as any outside areas, listing features that might be awkward now or that you imagine might be hard in the future if your condition deteriorates. Look for features that may particularly exacerbate your condition or make it hard to move around or carry out daily tasks like food preparation or looking after yourself or your home. Simple adaptations or changes might make a big difference to you enabling you to do the things you enjoy most at home.

Design and layout

General mobility - create the space to move around and prevent falls

If you have a severe respiratory disease and you find that you get very breathless when moving around or when stretching or bending to reach for things, you may find it helpful to change the layout and organisation of your home. You might:

- Re-position the furniture to make walking around easier.
- Keep frequently used items close to hand.
- Have sturdier furniture in places where it would help you sit or to lean on whilst catching your breath.
- Consider in the garden seating areas to enable you to take a breather.
- Use a higher bed might help with breathlessness and there is equipment that can help you to get in and out of bed. You could also use a well-positioned high back chair with arms nearby to help transition to standing.
- Install a second banister on the stairs (this would enable you to keep using them to maintain mobility and muscle tone.)
- Consider a stair lift if stairs become unmanageable.

Dealing with strain and breathlessness

Ventilation is particularly critical. Lifting heavy items, or climbing/bending to retrieve awkwardly stored items can also be a problem if exertion causes breathlessness. You could:

- Consider using sliding door wardrobes and cupboards with regularly used items at an easily reachable height to prevent stretching and bending.
- Keep all rooms especially kitchens and bathrooms well aired using an extractor fan in the window or with windows open as appropriate to reduce dampness and improve ventilation.
- Use an extractor hood over the cooker.
- Install a controlled ventilator and/or extractor fan in the window or on an external wall.
- Limit moisture vapour creation by covering boiling saucepans and pans.
- Install a level hob so you can slide pans across worktops to prevent exertion.
- Have an eye level oven to prevent strain on bending.
- Use drawers which slide out, rather than cupboards with fixed shelves.
- Keep the things you use every day on work surfaces or stored at the front of the cupboards that are easiest to reach.

- Consider specially designed items such as tilting kettles to avoid lifting (See Gadgets and equipment on Page 15).
- Installing a level access shower may make a significant difference to being able to look after yourself in the longer term. Getting in and out of a bath can become more difficult anyway as you get older. Half of all requests to social services for help with home adaptations are for bathing.

Some people whose asthma is affected by dust mites find it better to have hard flooring, such as vinyl, lino, laminates or polished wooden floors, rather than carpets.

Soft furnishings such as thick curtains, cushions and fabric upholstery may also exacerbate symptoms. Consider using materials such as roller or wooden blinds, either getting rid of cushions or using special liners for pillows and cushions and have leather/leather-type sofas and chairs.

Occupational therapists (OTs) are the main professionals to advise and you could also try your local Home Improvement Agency if you have one. Contact Foundations <http://www.foundations.uk.com/>

See Organisations that can help on Page 17

Occupational therapy services are available free of charge from the NHS and social services so contact social services in the first instance. If it takes time for an OT to visit, try the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) <http://www.dlf.org.uk/?gclid=CMrPrKHz59UCFQngGwodVLsGjw> for information on the options to consider.

Independent occupational therapists usually provide services that are not available from the NHS or social services and/or have no waiting lists. You can find a properly trained and registered OT via the College of Occupational Therapists

<https://www.cotss-ip.org.uk/find#?location=SE5+9AW&service=0>

You can also call the Professional Practice Enquiries Service at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists 020 7450 2330

Quick checklist: **Design and layout**

Tick box

- Rearrange rooms/furniture to move around easily**
- Keep frequently used items close to hand
(at the front of cupboards)**
- Have sturdier furniture in places to help you sit
to catch your breath**
- Consider seating areas in the garden to take a breather**
- A higher bed might help with stiffness or furniture
nearby to help with transition**
- Consider a second banister or stair lift**
- Consider sliding drawers and doors where appropriate**
- Keep all rooms well aired using extractor fans on the window**
- Use an extractor hood over the oven**
- Limit moisture vapour creation by covering boiling pans**
- Install a controlled ventilator or an extractor fan
on an external wall**
- Use drawers which slide out rather than cupboard
with fixed shelves**
- Put in lever taps and easy to use controls**
- Consider installing a level hob and an eye level oven**
- Look for items like tilting kettles and electric can openers
to help in the kitchen**
- Consider installing a level access shower and other
home adaptations for bathing**
- Use hard flooring to prevent dust mites**
- Review soft furnishings and consider roller/wooden blinds
and special linings for pillows and cushions**



Ventilation and heating

Dealing with strain and breathlessness

A home which is warm, dry and well ventilated, especially in colder weather, is critical for people with respiratory conditions, as cold damp homes can make their symptoms worse. Some modern homes, or even older homes, which have installed UPVC doors and double-glazed windows, may be highly sealed and have a limited airflow.

If you keep all windows closed and do not go in and out of the front and back doors very often, the rate of change of air in the home can be low, potentially resulting in moisture and particle build up which can exacerbate symptoms.

Newer double glazing does have trickle vents (i.e. small holes, sometimes with manually adjustable covers) that allow in a controlled flow of fresh air.

It is important that anyone with a respiratory complaint

- Open the vents in double glazed windows regularly.
- Open sealed windows for some time during the day to get adequate fresh air into the home.

Damp walls, and the spores from mildew and mould growth can also exacerbate respiratory diseases and they need to be treated. Understanding the difference between damp and condensation will help to identify the best remedial action.

Dampness is caused by water penetrating the fabric of the building. If damp is moving up the wall from ground level this is rising damp. If there is a patch of damp on a wall not originating at ground level, this is penetrating damp.

Condensation occurs where water vapour in the air turns back to water when it touches a cold surface. For example, if a loft is not insulated the ceiling will be very cold, so when the warm, moist air (e.g. from running a bath) touches the cold surface, water droplets appear. These form the damp patches that mould and mildew can grow on.

Making surfaces warmer through loft and wall insulation, and reducing the moisture level in the air help to reduce condensation.

If you are worried about damp and condensation and want to find builders that can help contact your local Home Improvement Agency

The British Lung Foundation has more information about lungs and indoor air pollution. See *Your home and your lungs* at

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/your-home-and-your-lungs>

For advice on damp, condensation and insulation options contact your local Home Improvement Agency. See *Organisations that can help* on Page 16.



Keeping warm

Make sure the house is warm and dry so as not to aggravate your condition. A home which is warm and dry, especially in colder weather, is critical for people with all long-term health conditions. Moving out of a warm, well heated living room into a cold hall, kitchen or bedroom can be particularly risky for people with long term conditions.

- Maintain a higher background level of warmth throughout all the parts of the home that you use daily if you can to prevent major fluctuations in temperature.
- Having a good heating system is essential. For most people with respiratory complaints, central heating (as well as being the most efficient form of heating) has the benefit of being a dry, controllable heat source.
- Solid fuel (coal or wood) fires produce fine particles which can further affect respiratory diseases, therefore good ventilation, having the chimney swept regularly and making sure the flue is in a good condition are even more important.
- If you find it hard to use the controls on electric or gas fires, you can ask the manufacturers if they have alternative controls that can be positioned to make it easier for you to reach or grip. See Gadgets and Equipment on Page 15.

Winter wrapped up from Age UK http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Information-guides/AgeUKIG27_Winter_wrapped_up_inf.pdf?dtrk=true
Living Safely and Well at Home from Care and Repair England
<http://careandrepair-england.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Revised-LIVING-SAFELY-Lft.pdf>

Quick checklist: Ventilation and heating

Tick box

- Open the vents in double glazed windows regularly**
- Open sealed windows for some time during the day to get adequate fresh air into the home**
- Keep the home warm, dry and well insulated and seek advice on help with heating and insulation**
- Deal with any damp or condensation by seeking advice**
- Sweep chimneys regularly and check the flue regularly**
- Fit plug handles or pulls on electric equipment**

Safety, security and technology

General mobility – create the space to move around and prevent falls

Falls can be a hazard as you get older. As joints stiffen, the risk of falls and accidents can increase, so it is worth thinking about how you might make your home safer. Simple measures such as keeping rooms free of general clutter on the floors, removing loose rugs or frayed carpets and having good lighting can help reduce risk of falls.

Many falls happen on steps and stairs. Fitting a second handrail on the stairs, putting up grab rails by steps and clearly marking the edges of steps and stairs are just some of the measures worth taking sooner rather than later.

Bathrooms are another major falls and accident risk area. Grab rails and a toilet seat riser can help with being unsteady when going from sitting to standing. No longer being able to use a bath safely is one of the main reasons that older people seek help with adapting their home. Installing a level access shower or wet room as soon as possible to learn to use this equipment can both enable you to look after yourself for longer, as well as making it easier for carers later on.

Occupational therapists (OTs) are the main professionals to advise and you could also try your local Home Improvement Agency if you have one. See Organisations that can help on Page 17.

Improve safety

To provide a safe home better lighting, as well the installation of low maintenance or mains operated smoke alarms and carbon monoxide indicators, will benefit everyone.

There is a growing range of equipment or Assistive Technology (AT) that can make independent day to day living easier by providing help to enable washing, dressing, cooking, eating and other daily activities or to offer greater security by the provision of an alarm system with links to people outside the home that can offer help in an emergency. There are also many developing technologies that help people to live their lives to the full at home offering help with communication, creativity and daily activities.

There is an increasing range of devices that use a variety of sensors fitted around the home to monitor activity by the occupant or changes in 'normal' activity. The sensors are often linked via a telephone line to a nominated person or a call centre. By monitoring the person's activities, the system can detect potential problems and trigger an alarm to a relative, carer, neighbour or emergency services.

Technology is changing rapidly with more devices available for communications and support and a rapidly changing landscape. Where appropriate we have offered a link to guides and organisations that can help.

Consider if an alarm system, telecare and assistive technology options might help you with daily living and offer you some reassurance at home.

- Alarm systems are activated by the person and are linked to a centre or nominated person.
- Telecare systems generally have sensors that monitor activities and alert a call centre or nominated person in response to lack of activity. Sensors might cover such areas as bed occupancy, flush use, fridge opening which assess if the person is mobile. Other sensors might include flood and extreme temperatures, gas sensors and also falls sensors detecting if a person falls.
- Assistive technology and equipment covers a range of products and equipment that help make independent living easier such as help with washing, dressing, cooking and eating as well as other daily activities.
- Safety and security may also be enhanced by a key safe or, a costlier option, a door entry system. Key safes can sometimes be provided by the local council if you install an alarm. The key is put outside in the safe and accessed by a code. Door entry systems can enable visitors to open the door without the host having to get up.

Oxygen therapy

Some people with COPD receive oxygen therapy from the NHS. This involves having oxygen cylinders in the house. You need to make sure your home insurer knows about this. Oxygen makes things burn more easily, so you need to be careful:

- Keep the equipment away from naked flames and other sources of heat.
- Don't smoke.
- Use only in well ventilated rooms.
- Keep oils and greases away from the equipment.
- Avoid storing cylinders near flammable liquids (such as petrol or paraffin)
- Keep empty and full cylinders in separate rooms, if possible.
- Return cylinders that are empty or you no longer need as soon as possible.

In some areas, a home safety and security check is offered – contact your local Home Improvement Agency via Foundations or your local Age UK

Information on alarms and telecare is available from NHS Choices – See <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/telecare-alarms.aspx>

and from the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) Ask Sara <http://www.dlf.org.uk/content/asksara>

Independent Age have a guide to Assistive Technology <https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/Factsheet-Technology-to-help-you-at-home-larger-text-version.pdf>



Quick checklist: **Safety, security and technology**

Tick box

Keep rooms free from clutter and remove loose rugs and frayed carpets

Ensure good lighting, especially over steps and stairs

Fit a second handrail up the stairway and grab rails by steps

Mark the edges of steps and stairs

Consider installing a level access shower or wet room

Consider a toilet riser and grab rails in the bathroom

Install low maintenance or mains connected smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to avoid having to change batteries

Consider if an alarm system, telecare and assistive technology options might help you with daily living

Consider installing a key safe and door entry system

Make sure you have considered the safety issues of using oxygen therapy



Gadgets and equipment

What is available and appropriate for you

There is an increasing range of gadgets and equipment available to enable people to remain independent at home. For detailed information, you can use Disabled Living Foundation's website – Ask Sara <http://www.dlf.org.uk/content/asksara> which has a great deal of information about what is available across a range of activities at home and includes details of suppliers. Some of the areas covered include products that will support you in using the bathroom, kitchen and bedroom, stairs and garden and home entrance.

Contact Ask Sara <http://www.dlf.org.uk/content/asksara> for more specialist information about daily living products.



Centres to try

In some areas of the country there are Disabled Living Centres and Centres for Independent Living where you can try equipment and products. Contact your local council to find out if you have one in your area.

Going out and about

For people whose respiratory condition particularly affects their mobility, going out and about can become a challenge. Yet not getting out of your home can limit your sense of independence and your ability to do tasks like shopping, get to health appointments or simply get out for pleasure.

Think about access to and from your home and in the garden so consider ramps and grab rails where feasible.

An Occupational therapist or Home Improvement Agency can advise.
See Organisations that can help on Page 17.

If you have or are likely to need a mobility scooter, then a storage space with access to an electric supply to recharge will be key. Remember it is important too to be assessed before you choose one. Use an independent living centre/disabled living centre or occupational therapist.

If you, or your friends and carers, need help with transport with a car then car parking will be important to you and specifically those spaces available for disabled drivers if you become entitled to a blue badge.

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge>

Thinking about moving home

You may decide that having thought about the suitability of your current home, moving might be a better option.

It is worth bearing in mind that many of the issues described above about living at home also apply to other housing options - such as the design and layout.

If breathlessness when walking is a major issue, a key factor to consider may be the location of a new home eg. hills, slopes, steps, availability of public transport.

If you are considering moving home and plan to use a scooter, storage facilities are worth thinking about, as is the space for scooters in the corridors of retirement or sheltered housing schemes.

Similarly, if you, your partner or carer mostly get about by car, the availability of car parking bays for disabled drivers may be an issue to consider.

Your main housing options if you decide to move home include:

- A more suitable and better located 'ordinary' property (i.e. not one which has been built specially for older people) such as a bungalow or a flat that you might buy or rent.
- Special housing built for older people, such as retirement or sheltered housing. In some, but not all, of these types of accommodation help may be at hand if you need it. Some will be designed to make them easier for older people with health problems manage, such as having space for adaptations and equipment and with no steps or stairs.
- Specialist housing with 24-hour on-site care, such as extra care housing or an 'assisted living' apartment. These may be available to buy or to rent.
- A care or nursing home.

Information about the pros, cons, costs and local availability of these housing options is available from the national, independent information and advice service FirstStop Housing and Care Advice.

Their website <http://www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk/> lists in detail local specialist housing developments (both for sale and rent) as well as related services. They produce brochures about housing and care options.

Wherever you choose to live, you might need help with day to day living, such as washing, dressing, cleaning and so on. FirstStop, as well as some of the organisations listed below, can offer information about how to find and pay for the care you need.

Organisations that can help

Asthma UK – www.asthma.org.uk

0800 121 62 44 (talk to an asthma nurse)

The British Lung Foundation – www.blf.org.uk

03000 030 555

Age UK – <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Tel: 0800 678 1174

Cystic Fibrosis Trust – www.cftrust.org.uk

0300 373 1000 and helpline@cysticfibrosis.org.uk.

Carers UK – www.carersuk.org

Advice Line: 0800 808 777

Disability Rights UK – <http://disabilityrightsuk.org/>

- General Enquiries: 020 7250 8181
- Personal Budgets Helpline: 0300 555 1525
- The Equality Advisory Support Service helpline: 0808 800 0082

Disabled Living Foundation – <http://www.dlf.org.uk/>

Tel: 0300 999 0004

First Stop – Information about the pros, cons, costs and local availability of housing and care options is available.

www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk

Independent Age – <https://www.independentage.org/>

Tel: 0800 319 6789

Home Improvement Agencies via **Foundations** their national body –

<http://www.foundations.uk.com/>

Tel: 0300 124 0315

NHS Choices – <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>

Occupational Therapists work with people to enable them to achieve health, wellbeing and life satisfaction through participation in activities that mean something to them, retaining independence

Occupational therapy services are available free of charge from the NHS and social services so contact social services in the first instance. If it takes time for an OT to visit, try the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) <http://www.dlf.org.uk/> for information on the options to consider.

Independent occupational therapists usually provide services that are not available from the NHS or social services and/or have no waiting lists. You can find a properly trained and registered OT via the College of Occupational Therapists <https://www.cotss-ip.org.uk/find#!location=SE5+9AW&service=0>. You can also call the Professional Practice Enquiries Service at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists 020 7450 2330

Silverlinks run by Care & Repair England is about creating networks of mutual support to enable older people to make informed decisions about their housing and related care. It provides useful information about housing and care options including a 'teach yourself' booklet <https://silverlinksprogramme.wordpress.com/>
Tel: 0115 950 6500

Useful guides

These guides offer advice and support for independent living

Alarms and technology

Alarms and technology from NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/telecare-alarms.aspx>

Assistive Technology guide from Independent Age

<https://www.independentage.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/Factsheet-Technology-to-help-you-at-home-larger-text-version.pdf>

Asthma, COPD and other respiratory diseases

Your Home and Your Lungs: British Lung Foundation

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/your-home-and-your-lungs>

General

A practical guide to healthy ageing Age UK/NHS England

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/hlthy-ageing-brochr.pdf>

Living Safely and Well at Home from Care & Repair England

<http://careandrepair-england.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Revised-LIVING-SAFELY-Lft.pdf>

Thinking Ahead: Housing, Care and Related Finance in Later Life from Silverlinks

<https://silverlinksprogramme.wordpress.com/resources-for-older-people/>

Winter wrapped up from Age UK

http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Information-guides/AgeUKIG27_Winter_wrapped_up_inf.pdf?dtrk=true

This guide has been produced with help from the Older People's Housing Champions network and The Elders Council of Newcastle Reader's Group.



The Older People's Housing Champions is a network of older activists who support action by older people's groups to improve housing and related services for an ageing population across England.

www.housingactionblog.wordpress.com



The Elders Council of Newcastle is a group of people who are committed to having a say about how to make Newcastle a great city in which to grow old. We do this in a variety of ways - peer research, arts projects, focus groups and regular meetings with service providers and policymakers.

www.elderscouncil.org.uk



Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing. It is a Registered Society with Charitable Status Reg No 25121R.

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www.careandrepair-england.org.uk Twitter @cr_england



Silverlinks is about creating networks of mutual support to enable older people to make informed decisions about their housing & related care.

<https://silverlinksprogramme.wordpress.com/> Twitter @_Silverlinks



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