

# Making your home a better place to live with heart disease



# Who is the guide for?

## **This guide is for people with heart disease and their carers.**

It focuses on the impact of heart disease 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.

# Contents

<b>How can this guide help you or a family member?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Symptoms of heart disease</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Financial help with repairs, improvements and adaptations to your home</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The home and garden</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Design and layout</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Lighting and heating</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Safety, security and technology</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Gadgets and equipment</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Getting out and about</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Thinking about moving home</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Organisations that can help</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Useful guides</b>	<b>17</b>

## How can this guide help you or a family member?

If you or your partner or family member have been diagnosed with heart 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 heart disease

‘Heart disease’ is a term that covers several problems relating to the heart and the circulatory system. Sometimes also called cardiovascular heart disease (CVD), it leads to the narrowing of arteries carrying blood round your body. The two main types of heart disease are:

**Angina** - When arteries become narrow they may not deliver enough oxygen-rich blood to the heart; this causes pain in the heart.

**Heart attack** - If a blood clot forms and blocks the coronary artery, then not enough oxygen-rich blood reaches the heart. This damages the heart muscle and may cause a heart attack.

The British Heart Foundation – see [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk) has further details about different types of heart disease as well as other general information and advice.

A common concern for people with heart disease is that symptoms such as shortness of breath, swollen legs and ankles, fatigue and worries about putting strain on the heart might make it harder to carry out ordinary daily tasks. But with the right support, some changes and adaptations, most people with heart disease can and do continue to enjoy living independently at home.

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
- dealing with loss of strength and control
- keeping warm
- compensating for any reduced vision and improve safety.

## 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/gloucestershirevpp/factsheets/housing/funding\\_repairs\\_improvements\\_and\\_adaptations\\_fcs.pdf](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/brandpartnerglobal/gloucestershirevpp/factsheets/housing/funding_repairs_improvements_and_adaptations_fcs.pdf)

and

[http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Factsheets/FS42\\_Disability\\_equipment\\_and\\_home\\_adaptations\\_fcs.pdf?dtrk=true](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 heart disease you may find that you get very breathless when moving around or become dizzy when stretching or bending to reach for things, especially if this affects your blood pressure. Lifting heavy objects can put a strain on the heart and again, can become an issue.

You may find it helpful to change the layout and organisation of your home to make life easier:

- Have sturdier furniture with high backs and arms so you can lean on them when moving about.
- Install handrails where there is a change of level or add ramps to make the home or garden as level as possible.
- Trip hazards should be limited so keep floors and the garden area clear of clutter and cables and put everything you want to use daily within easy reach.
- Consider, in the garden, seating areas and a sheltered area as well as storing tools safely and out of sight.
- Consider installing a level-access shower room or wet room or install rails around the bath or shower.
- Install a second bannister on stairs. Consider a stair lift if the stairs are becoming unmanageable or a 'through floor lift' if the stairs are unsuitable.
- Consider non-slip flooring, fit loose carpets and look at using sturdy non-slip footwear.
- Change layouts – for example in the bedroom to have a safe, easy route to the bathroom with space for walking aids if used.
- If you need a wheelchair, you may need to have the doorways widened.

## Dealing with strain and breathlessness

- Rearrange storage to enable access without constant bending or climbing and avoid climbing on chairs to access items. Use a short ladder or steps with a handrail to reach a high shelf.
- Consider the use of drawers which slide easily rather than cupboards with fixed shelves and look at having sliding door wardrobes and cupboards.
- A higher bed might help with stiffness in the morning and there is equipment available to help with getting in and out of bed. A well placed high seat chair nearby can help you to get up safely.
- There is a range of gadgets and equipment available to help with daily living – see Gadgets and equipment on Page 13.

## Dealing with loss of strength and control

- Put in lever taps and 'easy to use' controls on baths, toilets and other appliances and grab rails by the bath/shower and toilet
- Consider installing a level hob so you don't need to lift pans and an eye level oven so you don't have to bend
- When buying kitchen appliances make sure they don't have small, awkward knobs and buttons and look for helpful items like tilting kettles and electric tin openers – see the section on Gadgets and Equipment on Page 13
- Consider high level planting areas in the garden to reduce bending and lifting and use specially adapted tools that save you from bending.

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 list of organisations on page 16

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

Information about living with a heart condition is available from the British Heart Foundation <https://www.bhf.org.uk/heart-health/living-with-a-heart-condition>

## Quick checklist: **Design and layout**

Tick box

- Have sturdier furniture with high backs and arms**
- Install handrails and add ramps to level the home and garden and easy access seating areas**
- Keep floors clear of clutter and cables**
- Consider a level access shower or wet room**
- Consider a second banister or stair lift**
- Use non-slip flooring**
- Check layouts to ensure a safe easy route for example to the bathroom from the bedroom**
- Rearrange storage to prevent constant bending**
- Consider sliding drawers and doors where appropriate**
- A higher bed might help with stiffness**
- Put in lever taps and easy to use controls**
- Consider installing a level hob and eye level oven**
- Look for items like tilting kettles and electric can openers to help in the kitchen**
- Consider high level planting areas and adapted tools in the garden**





# Lighting and heating

Being able to use lighting and heating controls is an important part of living independently at home.

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

- Ensure lighting and heating switches/controls are easily accessible and preferably have raised sockets and lower lighting switches.

## *Dealing with strain and stiffness*

- Try touch sensitive lamps or motion sensitive (activated by movement) lights which might be particularly helpful in the bedroom.
- Fit plug handles or pulls on electric equipment.

## *Dealing with loss of strength and control*

- If the controls on heating systems are difficult, ask the manufacturers if they have alternative controls that are easier to use. For example, there may be alternative controls that can be positioned to make it easier for you to see and manage.
- Many DIY stores as well as shops selling disability aids, sell plug handles or pulls which can be attached to the back of electric plugs making them easier to use if you have a limited grip.

## *Keeping warm*

Make sure the house is warm and dry so as not to aggravate your condition. Living in a cold home puts you at a greater risk of exacerbating heart problems, as well as other circulatory diseases (e.g. stroke), so having an efficient central heating system with programmable controls is important. A home which is warm and dry, especially in colder weather, is critical for people with all long-term health 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.
- Moving out of a warm, well heated living room into a cold hall, kitchen or bedroom can be particularly risky.
- Make sure your home is well insulated and draughtproof but good ventilation is required if solid fuel (coal or wood) fires are used. Check if there is any damp or condensation.
- It is also important to ensure that chimneys and flues are in good condition and swept regularly.

Winter wrapped up from Age UK [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Information-guides/AgeUKIG27\\_Winter\\_wrapped\\_up\\_inf.pdf?dtrk=true](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>

For advice on damp, condensation and insulation options contact your local Home Improvement Agency. See Organisations that can help on Page 16. The Energy Savings Trust offers advice on energy efficiency  
<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/>



## Quick checklist: **Lighting and heating**

Tick box

**Have sockets and switches positioned at accessible heights**

**Consider motion or touch sensitive lighting**

**Install 'easy to use' heating controls**

**Fit plug handles or pulls on electric equipment**

**Keep the home warm and well insulated and seek advice on help with heating and insulation**

**Deal with any damp or condensation by seeking advice**

**Sweep chimneys and check the flue regularly**



# Safety, security and technology

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

With any chronic or worsening health condition which can also have associated acute attacks, it is worth thinking about how you might make your home safer, especially if you live alone.

Falls can be a hazard as you get older. The risk of falls and accidents can increase. 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 and learning 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 16.

The website [www.asksara.dlf.org.uk](http://www.asksara.dlf.org.uk) has further practical ideas about safety living with heart disease.

## *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.

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
- Fit a key safe or door entry system



## 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> or 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.

## Getting out and about

For people whose heart condition particularly affects their ability to walk any distance, 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 16.

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 major 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

Age UK – <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Tel: 0800 678 1174

The British Heart Foundation – [www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

0300 330 3311

Carers UK – [www.carersuk.org](http://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](http://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 telecare 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>

### *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](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](http://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](http://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.

Head Office: The Renewal Trust Business Centre,  
3 Hawksworth Street, Nottingham NG3 2EG

[www.careandrepair-england.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair-england.org.uk) Twitter @cr\_england



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



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