

**Making your  
home a better  
place to live  
if you have a  
long-term health  
condition**





## Who is the guide for?

### **This online guide is for people diagnosed with a long-term health condition in later life.**

The most common conditions include arthritis, heart disease, respiratory diseases, macular disease and stroke. It focuses on the impact of these conditions 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. A separate *guide* is available for people with dementia and for people with each condition mentioned in this guide.

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, your partner or family member have been diagnosed with a long-term condition or disability in later life, there are several things you could do to improve your home environment 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
- 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 something you want to consider.

## Common conditions and symptoms

The most common long-term health conditions in later life include arthritis, heart disease, respiratory diseases, macular disease and stroke. Dementia too is a long-term condition and the subject of a separate *guide*. It is the impact of these health conditions on daily living that can affect your ability to live well at home.

The impact might include pain, stiffness, loss of strength, strain in lifting and difficulty moving around. It might also include breathlessness and dizziness which can lead to difficulties undertaking daily tasks. If sight is affected the loss of or blurring of vision can be an obstacle to be overcome with unsteadiness and confusion being symptoms.

Our aim 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
- on dealing with strain, stiffness and breathlessness
- compensating for reduced vision, improving navigation around the home
- dealing with loss of function, strength and control
- keeping warm.



A more detailed discussion of each condition can be accessed here

## Financial help with repairs, improvements and adaptations to your home

If you are on a limited income and have been affected by a condition restricting your movement or making 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.

Further information is available from Disability Rights UK *Housing Grants* and Age UK *Funding repairs, improvements and adaptations* and *Disability equipment and home adaptations*.



## 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 make it hard to move around, carry out daily tasks like food preparation, look after yourself (such as washing and dressing), look after the home keeping it clean and tidy and, of paramount importance, enable you to do the things you enjoy most at home. Simple adaptations or changes might make a big difference to you.

# Design and layout

## Concern

General mobility:  
create the space to  
move about safely  
and reduce falls

## Changes to consider

- 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.
- Keep floors and the garden area clear of clutter and cables and put everything you want to use daily within easy reach.
- Make enough space in each room and in the garden to enable the use of walking aids. If you can minimise the distance you have to walk to move around the home or garden or the objects you have to navigate.
- 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 and look at using sturdy non-slip footwear too.
- 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.

## Who might advise\*

*Occupational therapists (OTs)*  
OTs are the main professionals to contact and you could also try your local *Home Improvement Agency* both of whom can advise if funds are available.

If it takes time for an OT to visit, try the *Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)* for information on the options to consider including their *Ask Sara* webpage which offers products and equipment to help people at home

# Design and layout

## Concern

Deal with strain, stiffness and breathlessness

## Changes to consider

- 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.

- Keeping rooms well aired to reduce dampness and improve ventilation - install an extractor fan, or at least open the window regularly.
- 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.
- Some people whose breathlessness is affected by dust mites might find it better to have hard flooring, such as vinyl, lino, laminates or polished wooden floors, rather than carpets. Make sure, that they are non-slip. Soft furnishings such as thick curtains, cushions and fabric upholstery may also exacerbate symptoms.

## Who might advise\*

*Gadgets and Equipment*

*Home Improvement Agency  
or Energy Savings Trust*

# Design and layout

## Concern

Compensate for reduced vision and improve navigation

### Changes to consider

- Make 'pathways' through the home and garden to navigate better.
- Colour contrast can help such as light walls and floors with darker furniture and stronger coloured doors to make passageways clearer. A contrasting colour handle will help.
- Trip hazards should be limited so areas should be clear of clutter and cables with non-slip floors and no loose carpets. Ensure there are non-slip mats in the bathroom area.

### Who might advise\*

*Daily Living Skills from the Macular Society (also listening version)*  
*Information for every day living RNIB*

- There is a range of equipment and gadgets that may help with navigation and daily living including larger TV remotes and telephones, simple manageable tin openers, floor pickers, and a range of kitchen/bathroom appliances.

*See Gadgets and Equipment*

## Concern

Deal with loss of function, strength and control

### Changes to consider

- 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.

### Who might advise\*

*Occupational therapist*

- 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
- Consider high level planting areas in the garden to reduce bending and lifting and use specially adapted tools that save you from bending.

*See Gadgets and Equipment*

# Lighting and heating

## Concern

General mobility:  
create the space to  
move about safely  
and reduce falls

## Changes to consider

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

## Who might advise\*

*Occupational therapist*

## Concern

Deal with strain,  
stiffness and  
breathlessness

## Changes to consider

- Try touch sensitive lamps or motion sensitive lights
- Fit plug handles or pulls on electric equipment

## Who might advise\*

*See Gadgets and Equipment*

## Concern

Deal with loss of  
function, strength,  
control

## Changes to consider

- 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

# Lighting and heating

## Concern

Compensate for reduced vision and improve navigation

### Changes to consider

- Strong but even and glare-free central lighting for rooms is helpful combined with bright directional task lighting e.g. reading lamps by chairs and spotlights for kitchen work areas.
- Rechargeable wall lights might also help. The location of lighting is as important as the light source to avoid shadows and glare
- Consider 'plug-in' night lights in the home and make sure the garden is well lit
- Maximising natural light is useful too by getting rid of net curtains or enabling curtains to be pulled back far enough to expose the whole window.
- Leaving lights on in bathrooms or toilets overnight might be helpful

### Who might advise\*

*Lighting solutions guide* from RNIB with Thomas Pocklington Trust

*Lighting* from Macular Society (also listening version)

## Concern

Keeping warm

### Changes to consider

- 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. 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 for people with long term conditions.
- Make sure your home is well insulated and draughtproof but good ventilation is required if solid fuel (coal or wood) fires are used.
- 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 is even more important.

### Who might advise\*

*Winter wrapped up* from Age UK includes help with heating costs

*Living Safely and Well at Home* from Care and Repair England

# Safety, security and technology

## Concern

Deal with strain, stiffness and breathlessness

## Concern

Compensate for reduced vision and improving navigation

## Concern

Deal with loss of function, strength, control

## Changes to consider

- To provide a safe home better lighting, as well the installation of smoke alarms and carbon monoxide indicators, will benefit everyone.
- 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, and 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 people to open the door without having to get up.

## Who might advise\*

In some areas, a home safety and security check is offered – contact your local Home Improvement Agency or local [Age UK](#) [Make a link to orgs](#)

[Information on alarms and telecare](#) from NHS Choices

[AskSara](#) Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) can offer advice on technology and other products to make life easier at home

[Assistive and inclusive home technology guide](#) from Thomas Pocklington Trust

[Independent Age guide to Assistive Technology](#)

[Using technology](#) Macular Society (also [listening version](#))

## 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* covering 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, garden and home entrance.

### *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

Think about access to and from your home and in the garden so consider ramps and grab rails where feasible. An *Occupational Therapist* and *Home Improvement Agency* can advise.

If you have or are likely to need a mobility scooter, then a storage space with access to 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*.

## Thinking about moving home?

You may decide that having thought about the suitability of your current home, particularly if it is located somewhere that might make going out independently more difficult, 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.

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. There are also some specialist housing developments for people with specific conditions such as sight loss.
- 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](#) 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 and offer a free telephone helpline 0800 377 7070.

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

These organisations offer advice and support for independent living

**Age UK** – <http://www.ageuk.org.uk>/Tel: 0800 055 612

**Alzheimer's Society** – <http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>  
Tel: 0300 222 11 22

**Arthritis Care** – <http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk> Tel: 0300 790 400

**Asthma UK** – <http://www.asthma.org.uk>  
Tel: 0300 222 5800

**Disability Rights UK** – <http://disabilityrightsuk.org/> General Enquiries: 0203 687 0779  
Personal Budgets Helpline: 0330 995 0404  
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

**Macular Society** <https://www.macularsociety.org/?gclid=COC89-Swg9ICFc6T7Qod-plNBg>  
Tel: 0300 3030 111

**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

**RNIB** Royal National Institute for the Blind – <http://www.rnib.org.uk>  
Tel: 0303 123 9999

**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

**Stroke Association** – <https://www.stroke.org.uk/>  
Tel: 0303 3033 100

**Thomas Pocklington Trust** – <http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/>  
Tel: 020 8995 0880

## Useful guides

These guides offer advice and support for independent living

### ***Alarms and technology***

*Alarms and technology* from NHS Choices

*Assistive and inclusive home technology guide*  
Thomas Pocklington Trust

*Assistive Technology guide* from Independent Age

*Using technology* from Macular Society

### ***General***

*A practical guide to healthy ageing* Age UK/NHS England

*Living Safely and Well at Home* from Care & Repair England

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

*Winter wrapped up* from Age UK

### ***Sight loss***

*Daily Living Skills* from the Macular Society *Audio version*

*Dementia and sight loss* University of Stirling

*Information for Everyday Living* RNIB

*Lighting* from Macular Society *Audio version*

*Housing Guide for People with Sight Loss*  
Thomas Pocklington Trust

### ***Specific Long-term health conditions***

For guides for people with dementia see the separate *guide*

*Help with Daily living* The Stoke Association

*Independent living and arthritis* Arthritis Care

*Living with a heart condition* British Heart Foundation

*Your home and your lungs* British Lung Foundation

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.

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**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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