Keeping Mobile

A Help the Aged advice leaflet

Endorsed by

RADA
the disability network
Keeping active and mobile is the key to an independent life. We can do a lot to keep ourselves moving, and many conditions which may affect us in later life can be prevented, eased or even cured altogether by being a little more active each day.

This leaflet looks at how to remain active and mobile, and at the help and advice available. Areas covered include:

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**Health and fitness**

Keeping fit and healthy helps you to stay mobile and independent. It is never too late to change your diet or take up some form of exercise to improve your suppleness, strength and staying power.

**Physical activity**

Whatever your age, regular, safe and enjoyable physical activity is an essential part of maintaining a healthy way of life. There are many benefits, from strengthening bones to making sure that your heart and lungs stay in their best condition. As a bonus, you will feel better inside and out! You don’t have to try and become super-fit; it is just a question of doing more of what you do already.
Being active and taking more exercise can be fun! Age is no barrier to taking up a new sport or physical activity. Getting fit has lots of other advantages too - feeling livelier and more active, meeting new people, enjoying a new activity.

If you don’t get much exercise at the moment, it’s a good idea to start gently and then build up. That way, your body will gradually get used to being more active, and you are far less likely to strain any muscles. If you are having medical treatment, talk to your doctor before taking up a vigorous activity or exercise.

There are many different ways to keep fit, so you should be able to find one you enjoy. If you prefer an individual sport, you could take up walking, cycling or swimming; if you like company, there are classes and clubs for many activities which are a good way of meeting like-minded people. Many local authorities run classes for older people and some have classes especially for people with medical conditions such as heart disease and arthritis. Ring up your local sports centre or your council to find out what is available in your area.

If you have mobility problems at the moment, ask your doctor or physiotherapist about finding an exercise programme or class which will meet your needs. An organisation called EXTEND trains teachers to give ‘movement to music’ classes to older or disabled people. If you would like to find out about teachers in your area, write to EXTEND, 22 Maltings Drive, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8QJ. Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

More detailed information on exercise for older people is given in Age Concern England’s Factsheet 45, ‘Fitness for later life’. Call the Age Concern Information Line on 0800 00 99 66 for a copy.
Overweight?

Surplus pounds can be a health hazard. Being overweight makes it harder to enjoy exercise, may make any problems with arthritis worse, and can increase the risk of heart and chest troubles, diabetes, backache and varicose veins - all of which can make you less mobile. If your mobility is severely restricted because of your weight, then it is time to ask your doctor for help and advice.

If you need to lose some weight, try and cut back on sugary and fatty foods. Don’t skip meals, or restrict your diet unless your doctor advises it. It is very important to have a varied diet so you get all the nutrients you need for good health. Remember it’s not healthy to be underweight, either! For further information on a healthy diet, see Help the Aged’s free advice leaflet ‘Healthy Eating’.

Look after your feet

It is difficult to keep mobile and active if you have tired, aching feet, or suffer from corns, ingrowing toe nails or bunions. Without proper care and treatment minor foot problems may steadily grow worse, affecting your ability to walk.

If you feel you need chiropody treatment talk to your doctor; in many cases he or she will be able to arrange free treatment through the NHS. For straightforward advice on taking care of your feet, see Help the Aged’s free advice leaflet ‘Fitter Feet’.

Smoking

It is never too late to give up smoking. No matter what your age, it is the single most effective thing you can do to improve your health. Your breathing will become easier, your circulation will improve and you will reduce the risk of developing diseases which can restrict your mobility. For advice on giving up smoking, or cutting down the amount you smoke, call the free QUIT helpline on 0800 00 22 00 (open 7 days a week from 1pm to 9pm), and talk to your doctor.
Arthritis, rheumatism and mobility

Rheumatic diseases affect millions of people in the UK. Pain and stiffness in joints and muscles can seriously affect your mobility. However, help is available. Your doctor may be able to prescribe drugs to relieve your symptoms, a physiotherapist can give help with special exercises and an occupational therapist can give advice on mobility aids and on protecting your joints. Your doctor should be able to refer you to a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist for this sort of help.

You may be interested in alternative forms of medicine - things like acupuncture or reflexology. However, consult your doctor first for a diagnosis of your condition. You can get details of registered practitioners in different forms of alternative medicine from the Institute for Complementary Medicine. Write to the Institute for Complementary Medicine, PO Box 194, London SE16 1QZ. Please enclose three first-class stamps to help cover their costs.

Mobility aids and useful equipment

If you have problems getting about, help is at hand! There are many different kinds of mobility aid, and finding the one that is right for you can help you to regain much of your independence. A walking stick is the simplest mobility aid - this can be helpful if just one of your legs needs extra support.

If both your legs need support, then you may need to use two walking sticks, a walking frame or a rollator. If you find it very difficult to walk at all, then you may need a wheelchair. If you are able to walk but find it difficult or tiring to get about as easily as you used to, then you may want to consider getting a 'personal vehicle'.


Walking sticks, walking frames and rollators

It is important that your **walking stick** is the correct length. It should be level with the wrist crease when your arm is held by your side. If you use two walking sticks to help you balance, they need to be longer because they will be held in front of you. A walking stick should have a rubber end called a ‘ferrule’, which prevents it from slipping. Ferrules wear out quickly so they need to be checked regularly. You can buy replacements from large chemists.

**Walking frames** give more support than a walking stick, are stable, and help increase confidence. **Rollators** are wheeled frames which are easier to manoeuvre and do not break up the pattern of walking. They are good for people with moderate balance problems.

Walking sticks, walking frames and rollators can all be supplied free of charge by the NHS. Talk to your doctor if you think you need a walking aid. He or she may refer you to the local hospital’s physiotherapy or occupational therapy department. Your local social services department may also provide walking aids. Always get advice from a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist on which walking aid is most suitable for you and on how to use it.

Wheelchairs

The NHS provides wheelchairs free to people who need them on a permanent basis. You don’t have to be a full-time user; you may just need to use one a few times a week. However, the rules on who is entitled to a wheelchair do vary from area to area. If you think you need a wheelchair, talk to your doctor or hospital consultant. He or she can refer you to your local NHS wheelchair service.

There are many different types of wheelchair, so think carefully about your own particular needs. Will you be using the chair indoors, outdoors or both? How long will you use it each day? Will you need to pack it away in a car? Ask your doctor, physiotherapist or occupational therapist for advice on what will be best for you.
If you can't get a wheelchair through the NHS, you may wish to look at buying one privately. This can be an expensive option, so again it is vital to get advice on choosing the right wheelchair for your needs.

Seek advice, whether you are getting your wheelchair through the NHS or buying one yourself. The Disabled Living Foundation, the Mobility Information Service and the Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Mobility Centre can all offer advice on choosing a wheelchair. Disabled Living Centres have a range of wheelchairs on display which can be tried out by appointment. Contact the Disabled Living Centres Council to find your nearest Centre.

If you only need a wheelchair on a temporary basis, you may be able to hire one or get one on loan from:
- your local social services department or hospital
- your local British Red Cross (a small fee may be payable)
- your local Shopmobility scheme (see page 12)

**Personal vehicles**

There are several types of small battery or petrol-operated 'personal vehicles' for sale. These are often called scooters, or buggies. They can be driven on pavements at up to 4 mph and some can be taken into shops and public buildings.

Another type of vehicle can be driven on the road at up to 8 mph. It is important to consider local traffic conditions and general road safety when thinking about buying a personal vehicle.

The Mobility Information Service and the Disabled Living Foundation can give you advice on choosing a scooter or buggy that meets your needs.