



Adaptations in Your Home

Suitable adaptations to a home are often an essential part of enabling a disabled person to live a full and active life. This factsheet covers the types of adaptations that people with disabilities can benefit from with the aim of providing a comprehensive guide to what is available. This will then enable you to confidently make the right decision on what adaptations best suit your needs and complement your lifestyle, allowing access and use for all.

Major Adaptations

Adaptations to your home can be expensive. The costs can be met partly or in full if you qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) (Please see TDF's DFG factsheet) however it can take up to two years from applying for a grant to completing the work. There may be certain equipment that can sometimes make your residence more suitable for your use in the short term whilst waiting for adaptations to be completed (Please see our Equipment Factsheet).

The first step before altering your home is to fully establish your personal needs and your financial situation, and then consider your options. Think about whether you can purchase equipment which will make your home more accessible for you, or whether you need a structural adaptation. It is also essential to find out whether it is technically possible to make a structural adaptation or whether you would be willing to move somewhere more suitable. For example, consider whether you can move into an already adapted house or flat available from one of the various housing associations that provide adapted accommodation for disabled people (See TDF factsheet on Housing). Alternatively you could consider whether you are entitled to a carer/personal assistant from social services or can afford to employ one privately.

In all, it is important to think the adaptation process through fully and seek professional advice if necessary, prior to making any changes.

Bathroom Adaptations

Converting a room into a bathroom/wet-room

Ordinary rooms can be adapted into bathrooms/wet-rooms. Downstairs toilets, bath/shower rooms can also be adapted for safe and easy use by disabled people. Options include extending the room, widening the door, lining and tiling the floor in order to make it waterproof and graduating the floor to make it self draining. If you go for the last two options you will create what is called a wet-room. It is important to look at choosing the best options that promote ease of use and safety.

Graduated floors/mobile shower equipment

By creating a slight slope in the floor of a shower room, water will drain away easily. This adaptation can help you create a wet area so that it is possible to wheel straight under the shower with no need to worry about water collecting in the floor area. This could be the best option if you use a mobile shower chair. It is possible to purchase a permanent shower seat for wet rooms. If this is the best option you can either get a seat that is fixed to the wall and floor or one that only fixes to the wall so can be lifted out of the way if other people use the shower.

Shower cubicles, trays and curtains

Fitting a cubicle in the shower area or fitting a shower curtain allows you to cordon off your shower area from the rest of the bathroom. A shower tray is fitted to stop water escaping the shower area across the bathroom (not recommended if you use a mobile shower chair) and if necessary you can still instal a shower seat.

Bath adaptations

If you like having a bath but find getting in and out a problem there are some adaptations available for you. You can either get a bath that you can walk in to and sit down or there are several aids that can help get a person in and out of an ordinary bath tub. Many local mobility shops sell these kind of aids and their details are often found in the Yellow Pages or you can contact TDF for more information.

Funding

Large adaptations are often funded via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) obtained from the Local Housing Authority. You should also tell social services you are applying as they will need to send an occupational therapist to assess your needs.

Other funding organisations include:

The Home Improvement Trust

Makes equity release more accessible to fund repairs and adaptations to the home.

Tel: **0115 934 9511**

E-mail:

info@hitrust.org

The Warm Front Grant Team

Provide grants to make the home warmer to households with the greatest health risk.

Tel: **0800 316 6011**

Website:

www.eaga.co.uk

Planning Permission

Major alterations may require planning permission to create the best design to suit your needs. Discuss this with your architect.

To find a suitable architect you can contact the Royal Institute of British Architects client services on **020 7307 3700** or you can search online at www.ribafind.org

To find a suitable contractor in your area please call your local council and ask for a list of approved contractors.

You could try the company MV Specialist Contractors. They operate nationwide and are experts in building for disabled people. Some of the staff are disabled themselves so they are able to give advice based on personal experience.
Tel: **01707 621480**
E-mail: enquiries@mvspecialist.com
Website:
www.mvspecialist.com

Kitchen Adaptations

The kitchen is often considered to be the heart of a home, and so it is a place that needs special consideration when making adaptations.

Changing the height of cupboards, surfaces, and other amenities in the kitchen is a common adaptation for wheelchair users to make the kitchen user friendly.

If you go to a specialist designer to design a kitchen to meet all your needs it can be expensive although it could be VAT exempt. It may be worth the expense to create the perfect room.

Adaptations to Stairs

The loss of mobility can make it increasingly difficult to do many everyday things including climbing up and down stairs.

Some options that may remedy difficulties using the stairs inside your home include adding a banister/hand rail, installing a stair-lift/wheelchair lift or converting ground floor rooms to meet all your requirements.

Hand rails

If you already have a banister on your stairs, you may find that putting another handrail on the opposite side will help.

Stair-lifts

A stair-lift may be a suitable solution if you are unable to climb the stairs even with the addition of an extra stair rail. It is important to measure both the stairs and the person who would be using the stair-lift to make sure it is suitable and safe to use. There are many companies that make stair-lifts so it is worth shopping around.

Wheelchair lifts

Wheelchair lifts can be fitted into many buildings and might be a suitable solution if you are a wheelchair user and your upstairs rooms are wheelchair accessible. It is important to position the lift in a place where the structure of the house can accommodate it as well as in the most appropriate place for the person using it. It is also vital to consult an architect if you are planning to install a wheelchair lift.

There are many pros and cons to installing a stair/wheelchair lift. For example it is often a cheaper, quicker and easier option than adapting rooms in your house, however, it has little re-sale value and may have to be removed before selling your house. If you do sell your home though, you can advertise the house as being adapted for the disabled, particularly in disability magazines and websites (Please see TDF's Housing factsheet).

General and External Adaptations

Door widening

Often doorways need to be widened to accommodate wheelchairs and walking aids. You will need to talk to an architect if you want to have this done, although it should be fairly straightforward.

Doors

Doors that open easily, doors that open both ways, automatic doors and those that open and close at the press of a button can improve ease of use for people with a range of disabilities. You can also purchase door opening systems to ease access into rooms and these can often be installed via social services.

Flooring

People with physical impairments benefit from smooth floor surfaces. If you get a carpet make sure that it is easy to navigate a wheelchair or walking frame in a straight line (low pile). Wooden floors are ideal but they can make rooms colder in the winter.

Ramps

This is an ideal solution if there are any steps on the premises, either indoor or outdoor, that you are unable to manage. When fitting a ramp it must have a gradient (the slope) no steeper than 1 in 12 (for each inclining inch, the ramp must be 12 inches long). Wheelchair users also benefit from raised edges to stop wheelchairs from falling off the side. Handrails are also a good idea to assist people who are ambulant. If a ramp is used to access the front door it is a good idea to allow for a flat area at the top to enable the door to open without falling back down the ramp.

VAT Exemption

Many adaptations to your home could qualify for VAT exemption. The rule for this is that the object has to be designed specifically for a disabled person.

For example if you bought a normal kitchen and fitted everything at a lower height it would not be exempt. However if you went to a specialist who designed the kitchen to your needs it would be exempt.

If you are unsure whether something is exempt or not telephone the VAT helpline before purchasing on **0845 010 9000**

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