

Equipment and Lifestyle Aids

Equipment and lifestyle aids have a role to play in helping people regain some or all of their independence after a brain injury.

Lack of coordination, problems with movement and poor vision are just some of the effects of brain injury that can make everyday tasks like eating, dressing and getting in and out of bed difficult to do. Fortunately, there is an ever-growing list of lifestyle aids that are designed to compensate for these types of problems.

Occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and speech therapists are among the health professionals with expert knowledge about choosing the right aids. The list below is a general guide to what is available and how they can help.

Eating and drinking

Tables and chairs The first thing to think about is sitting safely and comfortably. It helps to have a chair with a contoured backrest and armrests for support that can be adjusted to the right height for the table. Tables with a cut out section help a person feel stable and to reach what they need easily.

Cutlery A wide range of modified cutlery is available. For problems with grip, built up handles work well and so do Velcro straps that wrap around the hand and the handle of cutlery. Cutlery might be lighter, heavier or shaped differently to help overcome the variety of challenges people have.

Plates and bowls It helps to have a plate guard that clips to a plate and provides an edge for people to push against. Suction cups on the bottom of plates and bowls are another modification that allows people to eat meals independently.

Cups and mugs are also modified in ways that make them easy and safe to use. A cup might have extra large handles on both sides, be insulated to prevent burns or have a lid and spout to help regulate the flow of liquid into the mouth.

Straws can have a one-way valve for people with difficulty sucking and swallowing.

Dressing and grooming

Clothes and shoes There are aids to help people dress themselves independently, whether it is doing up buttons or putting on stockings, socks or shoes. Some clothes are specially designed to be easy to get in and out of. Look for Velcro and elastic instead of zips and buttons, and think about t-shirts and other types of clothing that are easy to wear. Shoes often have Velcro or elastic laces instead of shoelaces so that they are easy to slip on and off.

Grooming aids Aids are used for everything from brushing hair to cutting toenails. Hairbrushes might have longer handles to help people reach, while heavier items like hairdryers can be mounted using suction caps. A universal cuff is a Velcro strap, which wraps around the hand and is used to place objects in a tubing pocket so there is no need to use fingers.

Adjustable beds and transfer equipment

It is important to choose a bed that meets an individual's support, comfort and function needs.

Beds can be electronically or manually adjusted to put people in positions that are beneficial and comfortable. For example, a knee break adjustment may be used to elevate the knees without elevating the feet and prevent the user sliding down the bed.

Height adjustment is often used to make it easier for carers to nurse someone, assist transfers and change the linen. There are many helpful accessories, such as built in massage, bed extensions and rails.

Companion beds are two beds that can be placed directly beside each other. Depending on the needs of the users, both or only one of the beds may be adjustable.

Adjustable beds need suitable mattresses that are flexible enough to bend with the movement of the bed. There is a choice of inner spring, latex or foam. If a person is likely to spend a lot of time in bed and is at risk of developing pressure ulcers, a pressure care mattress or overlay can help.

Transfer equipment is used to help people get in and out of bed or reposition themselves. These might include a bed stick, which acts like an anchor point for people to hold onto as they turn in bed, or a self-help pole, which is a triangle shaped handle that sits above a person's head and allows them to lift themselves up from the bed. Transfer equipment is also designed for carers, the most common being the slide sheet.