

5. PRACTICAL HELP



There are many ways in which some of your everyday caring tasks can be made more manageable. Specialist equipment such as adapted cutlery, bath seats, sensory toys, walking aids and alarm systems can enable the person you care for to be more independent, to develop their skills and thus lighten the impact on you. Caring for someone can be physically demanding but adaptations to the home such as installing handrails and ramps or major works like stair lifts and ceiling track hoists, can enable you to undertake your caring tasks in a way that does not put your safety at risk. Furthermore, there are free or low cost schemes and services designed to give assistance with gardening, odd jobs and home safety which could help you to keep up with the jobs you no longer have time for.

Equipment

Equipment can be obtained in a number of ways. This will depend on what is needed, the service that is best placed to provide it, and cost factors such as whether you would need financial assistance or if you are able to pay privately. The National Health Service (NHS) is responsible for supplying medical equipment such as bedpans, commodes and hearing aids. This means that the cared for person's GP can prescribe them or make a referral to a specialist provider. Social services, charities and private companies are the other main providers of equipment.

Croydon Social Services

Social services can supply a variety of equipment to help with everyday tasks and can also arrange adaptations to the home. This support can only be offered if, following an assessment of need by an occupational therapist (OT), the criteria for support are met. Croydon Social Services recommends that in the first instance, you (or the person you care for if they are able) complete an online assessment for disability equipment known as Self-Assessment Rapid Access, or SARA for short. This asks a series of questions about daily life and uses your answers to generate an immediate report with suggestions about products or services that may help. You can find SARA at www.croydon.gov.uk by entering SARA in the search box. You can also complete SARA over the telephone (ask to be called back to save your bill) by contacting Social Services for Adults on 020 8726 6500 or Children's Services on 020 8726 6400.

The advice in the report may be all that is required for your circumstances but if more help is needed, an OT assessment in the home of the cared for person will be required. You can self-refer or ask a professional to do this on your behalf. Referrals are prioritised according to the level of need and a waiting list operates. An OT assessment for an adult can be requested by contacting Social Services for Adults on 020 8726 6500. If, after an assessment, it is agreed that a piece of equipment or a minor adaptation is essential there will be no charge. If a major adaptation is agreed, there will be a financial assessment to see if the cared for person will have to contribute to the cost. Any equipment that social services can loan you is available free of charge, but supplies are limited and for some equipment there is a waiting list. It is also possible to get a one-off direct payment from social services to pay for equipment, see chapter two for more details. If large-scale building or installation works are needed in the home, government grants and loans may be available and the OT will advise you further about these.

If you are caring for a disabled child up to the age of 18, the Children's Occupational Therapy Service may be able to help if your child has "a permanent and substantial disability". The team is located at the Crystal Centre for Children's Services and parents can contact them directly on 020 8274 6850 for advice about equipment, or to carry out an assessment for re-housing, or an adaptation to an existing property. The service is unable to fund educational equipment that could be provided by your child's school and home safety equipment that is readily available in shops. Items of equipment

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are given on free loan for as long as they are required but are subject to regular review to ensure they still meet your child's needs. Assistance can also be given with funding applications to pay for major adaptations.

Mobility Equipment

The Wheelchair Service (020 8665 9313) provides advice and ongoing support for children and adults with mobility problems and provides wheelchairs and major buggies on long-term loan. A referral from a GP or care manager is required and the waiting time will depend on the needs of the person.

If the person you care for gets the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or the War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement they can use this money to buy a powered wheelchair or scooter, or to hire or purchase a new car from Motability (0845 456 4566, www.motability.co.uk). They do not need to be the person who will drive the car, so this scheme is also available to children in receipt of DLA mobility component.

Obtaining and Selling Equipment

Croydon Social Services and the NHS jointly run a central equipment store called the Access Ability Centre, which is where the Wheelchair Service (020 8665 9313) and the Aztec Centre (020 8664 8860) are based. Some items of equipment can be expensive so before buying it is recommended that you get advice first. The Aztec Centre offers specialist help and advice and the opportunity to try out a wide range of equipment for daily living.

You can of course buy or hire equipment independently of statutory providers. We are not able to recommend particular commercial suppliers, but you can get free, impartial advice about all sorts of equipment for disabled children, adults, older people and carers from the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF) (0845 130 9177, www.dlf.org.uk). As well as a helpline, the DLF has free factsheets on subjects such as clothing, footwear, mobility and communication aids. There are also large exhibitions such as those run annually by Naidex (www.naidex.co.uk), which give you the opportunity to see the latest technology, try out products and meet a number of commercial suppliers in one place.

There is a big market in second hand disability equipment. The Disability Equipment Register (01454 318 818, www.disabilityequipment.org.uk) provides a free service to enable people to buy and sell items of used disability equipment online. Magazines such as Disability Now (020 7619 7336, www.disabilitynow.org.uk) and online auction sites, such as Ebay (www.ebay.co.uk) are options to consider when buying or selling equipment. Even if you buy second-hand, you still have certain consumer rights and the seller must accurately describe the product and make you aware of any faults. Buying second-hand from a retailer is generally more expensive than buying from a private individual, but the equipment is likely to have been serviced and should be in reasonable working order.

If you need to hire a wheelchair you can get a long-term loan from the Wheelchair Service (020 8665 9313). If the person you care for has been in hospital, they may be able to borrow equipment from the hospital to use at home for a short time after they have been discharged. Some Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association (020 8662 1000, www.cnca.org.uk) groups loan disability and mobility equipment to people who live within their area.

Our factsheet *Specific Conditions* lists organisations that cover specific disabling or medical conditions. A number of these can advise about and supply specialist equipment, for example for people with a visual or hearing impairment.

The following organisations may also be helpful for a range of equipment needs:

- AbilityNet (0800 269 545, www.abilitynet.co.uk) helps adults and children with disabilities to use computers and the internet by selling and installing specialist computer equipment and giving details of funding sources.
- Age Concern Croydon (020 8680 5450, www.ageconcerncroydon.org.uk) sells Elsan Blue Fluid for cleaning commodes and also offers a free delivery service.
- The British Footwear Association (01933 229005, www.britfoot.com) can give advice about where to obtain less common shoe sizes or single shoes.

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- Croydon's Continence Service (020 8274 6409) provides continence products for adults and children.
- The Croydon Shopmobility Scheme (020 8688 7336) is based in the Whitgift Centre car park. You can hire an electric shopping scooter or wheelchair to use while you are shopping in the town centre. It may be advisable to pre-book at busy times.
- DEMAND (01923 681 800, www.demand.org.uk) can advise about equipment and will design and manufacture bespoke items, free of charge, where no off-the-shelf solution exists.
- Fledglings (0845 458 1124, www.fledglings.org.uk) helps parents and carers of disabled children to find solutions to practical problems of everyday living, by giving information and advice as well as sourcing and supplying equipment. It specialises in finding unusual items not readily available elsewhere.
- MERU (01372 725 203, www.meru.org.uk) produces custom-made equipment for disabled children and young people, when nothing else exists to meet a need. Referrals must be made via a professional such as a physiotherapist.
- The RADAR National Key Scheme offers independent access to accessible toilets throughout Britain. Keys can be obtained from DisabilityCroydon (020 8684 5538, www.disabilitycroydon.org.uk) and RADAR (020 7250 3222, www.radar.org.uk).
- REMAP (0845 1300 456, www.remap.org.uk) designs and produces one-off technical aids, free of charge, where nothing suitable is available commercially, or through the NHS or social services.
- U Can Do IT (020 7730 7766, www.ucandoit.org.uk) teaches disabled people of all ages computer and internet skills. It can also supply refurbished computers to people who do not have their own.
- Whizz-Kidz (0845 052 1231, www.whizz-kidz.org.uk) provides an advice line for parents, mobility equipment, and wheelchair skills training to disabled children up to the age of 18.

Value Added Tax (VAT)

One way of reducing the cost of buying equipment is to ensure that VAT is not paid on items that come under the disabled persons VAT relief scheme. This scheme allows for certain goods and services to be zero-rated for VAT, as long as they meet specific criteria, including being solely for the personal or domestic use of the disabled person. Carers can buy equipment on behalf of disabled people and still get the VAT reduction. It is important to get advice about this issue, including information about who qualifies as a disabled person; contact the HM Revenue and Customs Charities Helpline on 0845 302 0203, option 3 or see www.hmrc.gov.uk.

Home Maintenance

Age Concern Croydon (020 8680 5450, www.ageconcerncroydon.org.uk) has a Handy Person Team which provides assistance to people aged over 55, as well as people of any age who are disabled or vulnerable. The team offers a Minor Repairs Service which can carry out small jobs such as changing light bulbs, fitting draught proofing or putting up pictures. The Skilled Jobs Service will carry out slightly larger jobs such as repairing fences and footpaths. Charges apply for both services. Age Concern also holds a Tradespersons Register of local builders, handymen, plumbers and electricians who have been recommended as trustworthy and have undergone Criminal Records Bureau checks.

Croydon Council has a service called Staying Put (020 8760 5505), which helps older, disabled or other vulnerable people, by giving advice and assistance to carry out minor repairs or major adaptations to their homes. There is a Handyperson Service which provides minor repairs and an odd jobs service at a reduced cost for people who are over 60 or disabled.

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Utilities

The companies that provide your gas, electricity, telephone and water supply can give advice and assistance to customers who are disabled, elderly or chronically ill and those with sensory impairments. This includes protecting customers from disconnection, which is particularly important if the person you care for uses a dialysis or breathing-support machine. Utility bills can be provided in large print, Braille or audio.

If your home is fitted with a water meter and your consumption is higher than average you may qualify for help with your bill via the WaterSure scheme which lowers the tariff at which you are charged. To qualify for the WaterSure tariff a member of the household must be receiving a means-tested benefit such as income support and either be in receipt of Child Benefit for three or more children under the age of 19 who live at the property, or a member of the household has been diagnosed with a medical condition that requires the use of a significant additional amount of water. For more details about this scheme, contact Thames Water on 0845 9200 888 or see www.thameswater.co.uk. WaterSure is nationwide, so contact your supplier if you do not use Thames Water.

There are a number of organisations and utility companies that offer grants to disabled and elderly people to help pay for measures to make the home more energy efficient. There are also grant-giving trusts, often linked to your utility supplier, that you can approach for help if you, or the person you care for, have difficulty paying your bills. Ask for our *Grants* factsheet for more details.

Home Safety and Security

We all need to make our homes secure, but caring for someone who is vulnerable is an even greater incentive to find out about schemes that can help.

The Age Concern Croydon Handy Person Service (020 8680 5450, www.ageconcerncroydon.org.uk) offers older people and disabled people of all ages a free home fire safety check and a free home security check and can supply and fit a keysafe (charges apply). London Fire Brigade (08000 284 428) will carry out free home safety checks and a free smoke alarm where needed.

Croydon Council has two projects that help residents with security and safety in the home. The SAFE Project (020 8760 5505) is a free service for older people in certain wards in the borough. A Home Security Officer can visit the home, give advice on accident prevention and home security, and supply and fit a range of locks and home safety equipment, including smoke alarms, shed padlocks and carbon monoxide detectors.

The Home Safety Scheme (020 8407 1399) aims to make homes safer for families with children under five who live in certain wards in the borough. A Home Safety Officer will carry out a free home safety check and give practical help and advice on ways to improve safety. This could include fitting safety equipment, such as cupboard catches and socket covers, checking plugs and fuses and installing stair gates.

Gardening

People who are living in certain wards in the borough and are over 60, or disabled of any age (ring to check eligibility as this information is subject to change) may be able to get help with gardening and grass cutting from Staying Put (020 8760 5505). The charges are at a subsidised rate depending on your financial situation. Croydon International Volunteer Service (020 8656 4941, www.croydonivs.org.uk) has volunteers who do one-off jobs in their spare time, usually at weekends, and commonly provide gardening for disabled and older people. A referral by social services or a voluntary organisation is required. Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association (020 8662 1000, www.cnca.org.uk) is sometimes able to provide volunteers to do occasional gardening for older, vulnerable or disabled people. If you decide to pay someone privately to help with the garden you might want to use Age Concern Croydon's (020 8680 5450 www.ageconcerncroydon.org.uk) Tradespersons Register to find a local gardener.

Meal and Shopping Delivery

If the person you care for has difficulty preparing their own food they might benefit from hot or frozen meals being delivered. An assessment of need may find that they are entitled to have the meals provided for them by Croydon Social Services (meals on wheels), although they will be financially assessed

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and that may result in a charge for the service, see chapter two for more information. If the person you care for is not entitled to receive Meals on Wheels through social services, or if they are able to pay themselves, they can contact a meal delivery service such as Wiltshire Farm Foods (0800 678 3060 www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com). Other meal delivery services are available.

All the major supermarkets now offer an online grocery shopping delivery service (delivery charges apply) which can be very useful if you care for a housebound person, but do not live with them, or if it is difficult for you to leave the home. Dairy Crest Doorstep Deliveries (0800 615 715, www.milkdeliveries.co.uk) provides deliveries up to six times a week of milk and other basic household goods.

Furniture

There are several organisations that can help you and the person you care for to furnish your home and will also collect unwanted furniture. Croydon Appliance Re-use Centre (ARC) (020 8662 8002, www.arc-croydon.org.uk) provides recycled and refurbished low-cost furniture and domestic appliances, including white goods. All items are guaranteed and can be delivered to the home. An extra discount is available for all those in receipt of an income-related benefit. Mind in Croydon runs a Furniture Service (020 8253 8201, www.mindincroydon.org.uk), which recycles donated furniture and household goods. These items make up a “starter home pack” and are then supplied to clients with mental health problems (who have been referred), and are moving into an unfurnished home from hospital, or bed and breakfast accommodation.

General Help at Home

Age Concern Croydon (020 8680 5450, www.ageconcerncroydon.org.uk) has a Help@Home Service which helps older and disabled people of all ages with things like cleaning, meal preparation, laundry, ironing, pension and prescription collection, and shopping. There is also a finger and/or toe nail cutting service provided at venues across the borough. Charges apply.

If you have a child under the age of five, you may be able to get practical support from Home Start Croydon (020 8667 0207) which could include help

with housework. Some Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association (020 8662 1000, www.cnca.org.uk) groups can help isolated, vulnerable or frail people with shopping and general help around the house.

Key Contacts	
Age Concern Croydon	020 8680 5450
Apetito	020 8688 1636
Croydon Appliance Reuse Centre (ARC)	020 8662 8002
Aztec Centre	020 8664 8860
Children's Services	020 8726 6400
Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association	020 8662 1000
Croydon International Volunteer Service	020 8656 4941
Crystal Centre for Children's Services	020 8274 6850
DisabilityCroydon	020 8684 5538
Disabled Living Foundation	0845 130 9177
Home Safety Scheme	020 8407 1399
Home Start Croydon	020 8667 0207
Motability	0845 456 4566
Safe Project	020 8760 5505
Shopmobility	020 8688 7336
Social Services for Adults	020 8726 6500
Staying Put	020 8760 5505
Wheelchair Service	020 8665 9313
Wiltshire Farm Foods	0800 678 3060
If you cannot find what you are looking for please contact the Carers' Information Service on 020 8649 9339, option 1.	