



Getting equipped to tackle forgetfulness

Top tips for family and friends

Equipment, gadgets and technology
to help people with dementia

This guide is for the family and friends of people experiencing memory problems and confusion. It is particularly to help people with the early stages of dementia.

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Why read this guide?

We hope families and friends will read this booklet together to:

- Think about things that are getting harder to do
- Make decisions together about what equipment might help
- Try to think about what might happen in the future

We hope this guide will give you:

- The chance to think about what equipment might help you
- Things to think about when you are choosing equipment
- Ideas about how to get equipment
- Sources of information and advice

“Although you may not want some piece of equipment now – you need to know who to contact when you do.”

“We thought about mum’s need changing – we’ll need to wind the help up gradually.”

“We need to start thinking about ‘what if’.”

This booklet was produced with the help of people with dementia, their carers, family and friends.

**top
tip**

Forgetfulness and confusion can be caused by many conditions – some of them can be treated. It’s best to talk to a doctor.



How can equipment help?

Equipment can:

- Help people to live more independently
- Help people to remain living in their own home
- Help to reduce the risk of accidents
- Help improve quality of life and confidence
- Help to support and reassure family and friends

Some issues to consider:

Equipment is not for everyone. People have different needs, abilities and preferences.

For some people equipment may be easier to accept than having strangers in the house. But it should not be used to replace contact and care from people.

Equipment can't replace people or eliminate all risk.

“I don't want to be covered with dangling gadgets.”



“I don't want strangers having access to my house.”

“It's got to be *assistive* technology not *replacement* technology.”

**top
tip**

The term ‘equipment’ can be used to refer to any device, gadget or technology that supports the independence, well-being or safety of people with dementia. Some people will call this assistive technology.

Things to think about:

- Equipment needs to be maintained, batteries need to be charged and it can go wrong
- Some equipment can be expensive
- It can be difficult to learn new things

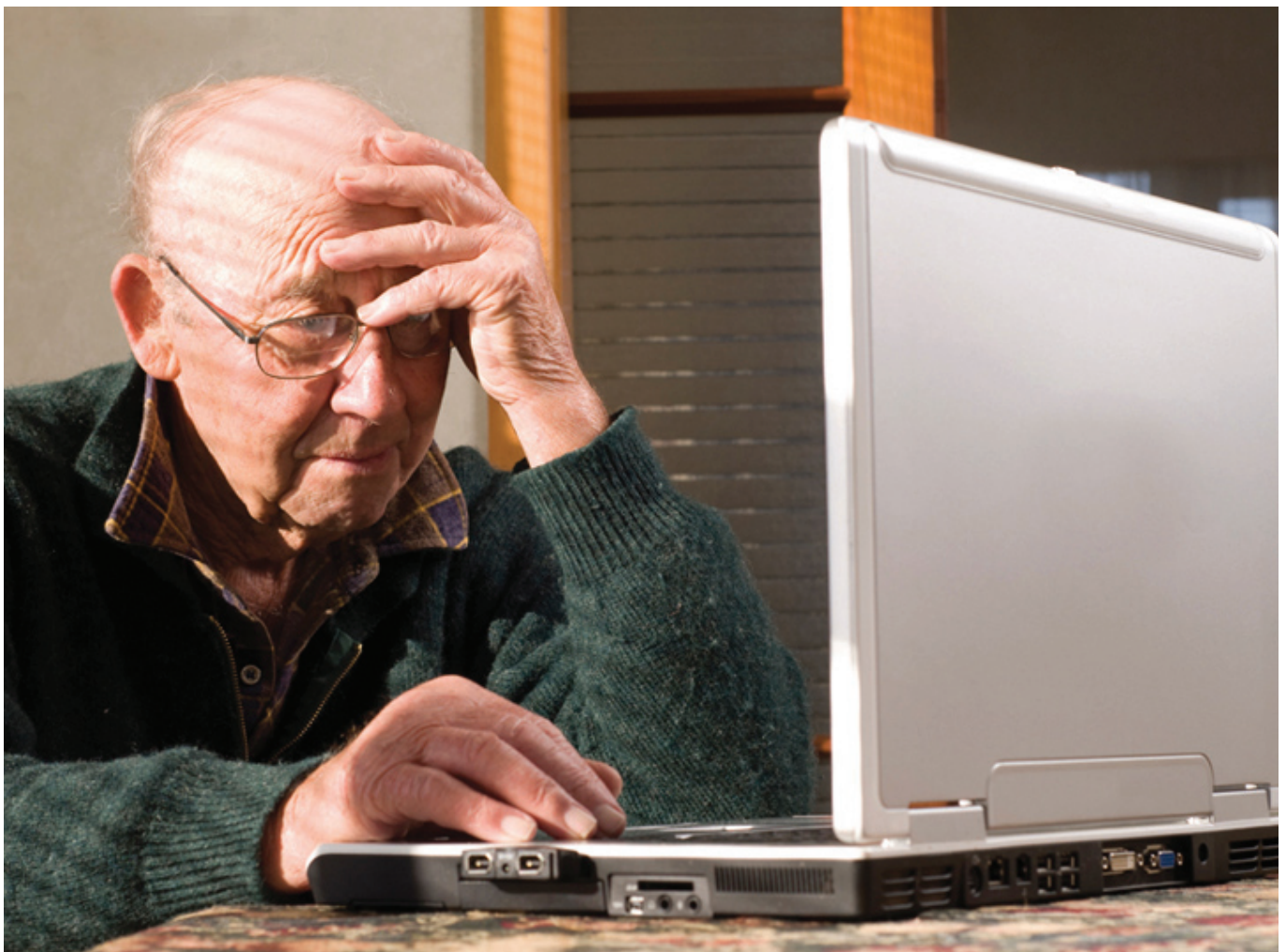
“It’s a very bewildering world for everyone getting older... Nothing is simple anymore.”

But...

Many people are happy with equipment. It often works best for people who have had the equipment for enough time, have got used to it and are happy using it.

“Using technology needs to be repeated regularly or it is forgotten...”

“My husband can remember to do things if it’s part of a routine.”



What equipment is out there?

- Equipment can be high or low tech, simple or complex, expensive or cheap
- Equipment can involve adaptations to the home or a simple purchase on the high street
- Some of these items may not be needed now, but it's good to know what's available and think about what you might need in future



Clock that indicates day or night

Day, date and time

There are many clocks and clock calendars with large displays and pictures, or that speak the day, date and time.

“I don’t know if it’s Shrove Tuesday or Sheffield Wednesday!”

Finding things

There are gadgets that can help you to find things such as keys or wallets. They flash or make a sound to guide you to them.

“We don’t lose things, they are temporarily misplaced!”



Item locator device

**top
tip**

Although equipment can be very useful for some people, it is not going to help everyone.

Remembering to do things

Some people use:

- Signs in words or pictures
- Notice boards
- Post it notes

There are also more high tech gadgets such as voice recorders. You can sometimes link these to a motion detector to trigger a particular message being played, for example by the front door. Or you can use voice recorders to remind you to get off a train or bus at a particular stop.

“It’s difficult to remember to do several things one after the other.”

Voice prompter



Taking medication

People often worry about not getting their medication right. Equipment that can help includes:

- Flip lid boxes labelled with the day of the week and time of day
- Automatic pill dispensers that make a sound or flash when it’s time to take a tablet

“It’s a great reassurance – knowing my mum has taken the right pills and not overdosed.”

Pill dispenser



**top
tip**

Specific product details can be found at www.atdementia.org.uk

Keeping safe

Everyone likes to feel safe in their own home. There are lots of gadgets to make people feel safe in their home, such as:

- Night lights or lights that turn on when they are needed
- Sensors that detect smoke, carbon monoxide, high or low temperatures or gas
- Gadgets that indicate when someone might have fallen
- Sensors that detect if the front door has been left open
- Sensors that detect if someone has got out of bed at night and not returned, or if someone hasn't moved out of their chair

“We’ve had problems with my wife leaving the gas on – unlit. The sensor isn’t as good as my nose – but knowing it’s there is a back up!”

“I’d compare it to fire extinguishers – you see them everywhere – they’re not used but you need them!”



Above: flood detector



Pressure mat

Extra back up – telecare

Many of these sensors can be linked by a phone line to an outside organisation. This is called telecare.

The equipment will alert people in a specialist response centre. They will know how to react. This might be:

- Phoning the house
- Contacting a carer or someone in the family
- Contacting another professional who can go to help
- Contacting the emergency services

Contact your local council social services department to find out more about telecare services in your area.

“We call it the ‘just in case’ machine.”



Telecare alarm system

Raising the alarm

Most people are familiar with alarm systems where you press a red button when you need help. These can be worn as a pendant or a watch, or be fitted as a pull chord or button on the wall.

“It’s nice to know that there’s always someone there.”

Some systems can be linked to a pager device held by a carer. But most go through a telecare system.

“If I press it by mistake, it doesn’t matter – it’s doing what it’s supposed to do.”

Getting lost

We can all get frightened if we lose our bearings when we are out. It can be very distressing for family and friends left at home too.

Some people carry a card with emergency contact details to show to someone if they get confused.

There are many gadgets that can ‘track’ our movements. Someone at home with a computer or someone in a telecare response centre can use these tracking devices to find someone:

- If they press a button to say they have got into difficulties

- If they don’t come home when expected

“I’ve had professionals tell me trackers take away my civil liberties – what do they know? It’s given me back my freedom.”

“It’s like everything that’s new – it took a bit of getting used to, but I don’t mind it now. It goes wherever I go.”

“Of course I don’t keep a track of my husband’s movement all the time! It’s not my business to know where he is – he has his independence. I’d only look if he pressed the button or didn’t come home one night.”

Below: woman with pendant alarm



Keeping in touch

To help people stay in touch with friends and family, there are telephones and mobile phones which have large buttons. Some also have space to put photos or names of family and friends which dial pre-programmed numbers.

Other equipment

There are many types of equipment that can help people as they get older or people who have problems with hearing, walking, balance, sight, or illnesses such as arthritis. For example:

- Grab rails
- Blocks to raise the height of chairs
- Aids to help people reach things

- Stair lifts
- Bathroom equipment
- Specially designed kitchen equipment
- Continence aids

More details of this type of equipment can be found at www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

or

by calling the Disabled Living Foundation on 0845 130 9177.

Large button telephone





Making decisions together

It can be difficult to approach the topic of changing abilities, but it is important to talk about this at an early stage.

“It’s difficult to admit that there’s anything wrong.”

Think about:

- The risks and benefits of using or not using equipment
- If there are better alternatives (such as people helping you or doing things differently)

Respect each other’s wishes and keep a balance between independence and safety.

“We’ve just got a care line red button pendant system. I’m not ready for it yet. But I’ve agreed that I’ll use it if I’m not well, if my wife is not well or if I’m in the house on my own.”

People with dementia can often make decisions and consent should always be sought. To be able to give informed consent people need to be able to:

- Understand the information
- Retain it long enough to make the decision
- Weigh up the information in order to make a decision
- Tell other people about their decision

If someone cannot give informed consent, decisions can be made and actions taken on their behalf if it is deemed to be in their best interests.

“My dad needs to know that he’s still in control. I don’t **take** things like dad’s ability to make decisions away from him... I wait and let him **give** the decision making away to me. He’s not so good with words. When I needed to buy him a new shower, I showed him pictures of some alternatives that I’d found on the internet. I just waited for a reaction and then I knew I’d found the design he might be able to use.”

For more help on this topic see the Alzheimer’s Society resources on www.alzheimers.org.uk or call them on 0845 300 0336.

Things to think about when choosing equipment

Everyone is different and there is no one piece of equipment that will be right for everyone. Think about:

- What you both want to do
- Where these activities take place
- The people and services that may be able to help
- The individual’s personality, changing abilities, physical needs, interests and ability to learn new things

“Our gadgets are a godsend – it’s a real help. That extra bit of reassurance - with us not living here with dad.”

**top
tip**

Make sure equipment is helping someone to do something and not restricting their activities.

Getting advice and an assessment

When considering the use of equipment, it's important to get the right information and advice.

“Not being able to use technology can have a negative effect on confidence.”

The first step is usually to have an assessment by a professional person. An assessment should help you understand:

- What support might be available – for all the family
- What equipment would be most helpful
- If any equipment can be obtained at no cost or a subsidised rate
- How to get hold of the equipment

“I didn't know the first thing about what is available.”

Anyone with a diagnosis of dementia should be entitled to an assessment but there may be a wait. Carers are also entitled to an assessment.



You might not need an assessment for very simple household gadgets, but it is still useful to talk to a professional about what your needs are.

**top
tip**

Contact your council's social services department to find out how to get an assessment. You can find contact details in your local telephone directory or on the website www.direct.gov.uk.

Getting equipment from NHS and social services

- If you are eligible for support, the NHS or social services may provide you with a limited range of equipment
- Your assessor will explain how to get the equipment
- You may be offered a budget to buy the equipment yourself
- Find out who will own the equipment and who will be responsible for maintaining it

top tip

Most people tend not to think of themselves as carers. But anyone who provides support, care or advice to someone they know will be called a carer. Using the label 'carer' may give you greater access to help and services that are available.



Buying equipment

- We all buy and use gadgets to make our lives easier, such as TV remote controls or alarm clocks
- You can use your normal buying skills to choose simple equipment
- It is useful if you can try before you buy
- It is your responsibility to look after it

Help with the cost of buying equipment

- Some items of equipment may be exempt from VAT if they are designed for disabled people
- Consider hiring or buying equipment second-hand, but you will need to check it works properly. See www.allaboutequipment.org.uk for more information
- The **Disabled Living Foundation** has a factsheet on sources of funding for equipment, available at www.dlf.org.uk or by calling **0845 130 9177**



“When we want something fun we go buy a gizmo – we think of this equipment as gizmos that will help us.”



Preparing some questions may help your discussion when it comes to having an assessment and choosing equipment

Where to buy

The following sources will help you identify shops in your local area:

- Your local **Disabled Living Centre** should provide details of local shops. **Assist UK** can tell you where your nearest Disabled Living Centre is if you call **0870 770 2866**



The British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA) has a directory of member companies that have signed up to their Code of Practice telephone: **020 7702 2141**
www.bhta.net

www.allaboutequipment.org.uk provides further guidance on finding shops that sell through mail order, online and on the high street

When buying equipment you are protected by normal consumer rights.

“You need to find a good one – but it’s difficult to find somewhere where you can try them out.”

Things to check to get the best out of your equipment:

- **The Disabled Living Foundation**
0845 130 9177
www.dlf.org.uk

and

- **Ricability**
020 7427 2460
www.ricability.org.uk

provide advice on the things to check when buying equipment – such as maintenance and installation costs, compatibility with other systems, battery life, insurance and what happens if it breaks down.



It is best to get advice before spending lots of money and you should never feel under pressure to buy.

Independent information and advice

The following organisations can help you find out more about the equipment that is available.

ATDementia

- Information about assistive technology for people with dementia
- Directory of equipment, prices and suppliers
- On-line AT Guide for people with dementia and their carers to find advice and product suggestions for everyday activities
www.atdementia.org.uk

Disabled Living Foundation

Directory of equipment for bathing, bedroom, stairs, seating and safety
0845 130 9177
www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Online self-assessment tool for simple equipment
www.asksara.org.uk

Ricability

Reviews of products for older and disabled consumers,
020 7427 2460
www.ricability.org.uk

Disabled and Independent Living Centres

UK wide equipment advice and demonstrations

Find your local Disabled Living Centre by contacting Assist UK
0870 770 2866
www.assist-uk.org

all about equipment

Information, advice and links to get equipment:
www.allaboutequipment.org.uk

*top
tip*

Think about how useful the equipment is and what else may be helpful at regular intervals.

Other sources of help

The Alzheimer's Society

0845 300 0336

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Carers Direct

0808 802 0202

www.nhs.uk/carersdirect



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Who wrote this guide?

This guide has been produced by the following organisations, with the support of the Department of Health. All the quotes are from people with dementia, their families, carers and supporters.

Foundation for Assistive Technology (FAST)

FAST works to improve the way equipment is designed, promoted and provided, and to ensure that it reflects the needs and wishes of older and disabled people.

0300 330 1430

www.fastuk.org

Innovations in Dementia

Innovations in Dementia specialises in involving people with dementia in work that affects their lives. **01392 420076**
www.innovationsindementia.org.uk

Trent Dementia Services Development Centre (Trent DSDC)

Trent DSDC promotes high quality care and services for people with dementia and provides information and advice on assistive technology.

0116 257 501

www.atdementia.org.uk

