

Adapting your home

Ways to help you stay
living at home



Information written with you in mind.

Our guides are produced with the help of older people, carers and expert peer reviewers.

This guide has been produced with the support of Dunelm.

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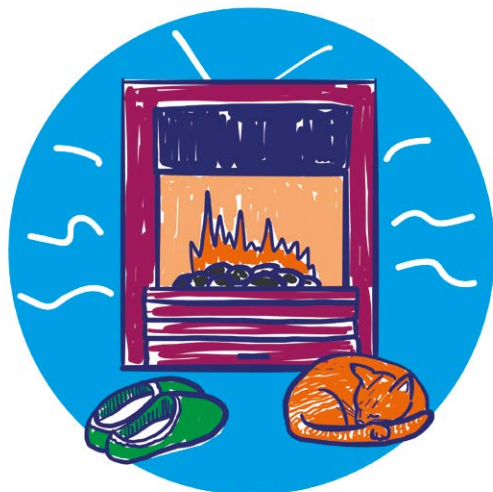
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What this guide is about

Most of us want to live in our own home for as long as possible. It can be a big part of feeling independent. But as we get older, it can become harder to manage for various reasons – for example, health problems or a bereavement.

You might find everyday things like preparing meals or getting dressed trickier than you used to. Or it might be harder to do regular maintenance on your home – especially if you live on your own.



All of the information in this guide applies to England. This symbol indicates where it differs for Wales and Northern Ireland. If you're in Scotland, contact Age Scotland for advice.

But by making some simple changes at home, you can make day-to-day living easier. This guide looks at things you could try.

Making changes to your home or the way you do things can sometimes have an emotional impact too – you might be delighted at the difference the changes make, but you may also find it a bit upsetting. It's OK if it takes time to adjust.

You might feel frustrated that you can't do as much as you used to – or annoyed that you need to ask for help. You might even feel anger towards your body because it doesn't work the way it used to. It's normal to feel these things. It can help to talk to friends and family about it – or you might prefer to contact one of the organisations listed at the back of this guide for support.



Next steps

It's a good idea to find out the number for your local council. They'll be able to provide a lot of the support and information mentioned in this guide.

My local council phone number is:



Thinking about your home

Being able to move around your home and do things comfortably can be a big factor in how happy you are there. This section covers some of the problems you might face around the house as you get older and how you can improve things.

Sometimes even familiar environments can become tricky to navigate. This can be difficult to come to terms with, especially if you've lived an active life – but it's a normal part of ageing. This section gives you tips to make it easier to get around and reduce your risk of accidents.



Good to know

You can find out more about the financial and practical help available in the 'Getting the support you need' section on page 26. It also includes information about getting a care needs assessment from your local council.

Accessing your home

Getting in and out of your home can be tricky – especially if you have arthritis, stiff joints or mobility issues. But a few simple changes can help.

- If you're unsteady on your feet, or if you struggle to use your keys in the dark, consider installing an outdoor light.
- If you find the steps to your front door difficult, you could have a rail installed – whether that's a grab rail or a longer hand rail. You could also consider asking a builder to create shallower steps.
- If you use a wheelchair, you might need to have a ramp installed – this could mean some larger alterations to the front of your home. If there's not enough space for a ramp, you could look into installing a wheelchair lift instead. A portable ramp could also be a solution if there's someone to help move it in and out of position.
- If you're a renter, a leaseholder or you have shared access to your property, you may need your landlord's permission or neighbours' agreement to make any changes.
- Some local councils offer an assisted bin collection service to help if you can't put your bins out yourself.

“Having an automatic light installed on the front step has made things much easier.”

Eddie, 80



Getting around

Making sure you can get from room to room easily and safely will help you to stay independent for as long as possible. It will also reduce your risk of falling.

- Keep walkways throughout your home clear by tidying away any trip hazards like rugs or cables.
- You could consider installing motion sensor lights that come on when you enter a room or when you get out of bed so you don't have to find a light switch in the dark. Or you could get touch lamps that come on when you touch the base.
- If you use a wheelchair or walking frame, make sure you have enough space to manoeuvre around your home. You might consider making bigger changes, such as widening door frames or re-hanging doors to open in the opposite direction.
- Although it's a major alteration, you might want to think about removing a wall or extending your house or flat to make extra space. This could allow you to move around more easily or have all your essentials on one floor.



Next steps

Contact the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (page 35) for more information.

Using the stairs

Stairs can make living at home a lot harder – especially if your bedroom or toilet is on an upper floor. Even if you're relatively mobile, going up and down the stairs several times a day adds up, and the impact on your joints and back can be significant.

If you can't reduce how much you use the stairs, something as simple as fitting a second handrail could help – or a stairlift may be more suitable. There are different types with useful features, such as:

- swivel seats to help you get safely on and off
- specially adapted controls that are easy to grip
- automatic safety stops if something's in the way.

If a second handrail or a stairlift isn't suitable, it might be possible to install a wheelchair lift – although this depends on the size and layout of your home.



Next steps

You might be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant to help with the cost of a stairlift (see page 29). Stairlifts are also available to buy from a retailer – visit the Living Made Easy website (page 34) or get in touch with the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (page 35) for information on choosing products.

See our guide **Getting help at home** and our factsheets **How to get care and support** and **Disability equipment and home adaptations** for more information. In Wales, see Age Cymru's versions of these factsheets.

Getting up and dressed

There's a lot of equipment available to make it easier to get in and out of bed, get dressed, or get up from chairs.

- Raisers can be fitted to beds and chairs to increase their height and make them easier to get out of. Alternatively, riser-recliner chairs and specialist beds can lift you into a position where you can stand – or lower you to sit or lie down.
- If you need help changing position when you're sitting or lying down, specialist equipment such as hoists, transfer boards and slide sheets could help. Ask your local council for a care needs assessment and advice first.
- You could consider simple things such as a long-handled shoehorn or gadgets to assist with putting on tights or socks to make getting dressed easier. Some clothes are easier to manage than others too – avoiding small buttons can help, for instance.
- If you find it difficult to bend, easy-reach grabbers can help you pick things up from the floor. Ask your local pharmacy if they stock these items or if they can order one for you. You might also be able to find them online.



Next steps

Ask your local council for a care needs assessment to see if you're eligible for help. They can also give you information about sources of assistance in your area. Turn to page 26 for more information.



In the kitchen

Preparing food and drinks can be fiddly and potentially risky as you get older – especially if you have arthritis, stiff joints or mobility issues. But you might find that, with the right equipment, you can continue to do this independently. Gadgets that can make things easier and safer include:

- wide-handled cutlery
- a one-cup kettle that's easier to lift
- high-rimmed plates and two-handled cups
- assistive tin, bottle and jar openers
- spike boards that let you cut or peel vegetables one-handed
- perching stools or chairs, which support you in a near-standing position
- sturdy trolleys to help you move items around.

If you use a wheelchair, consider installing adjustable-height work surfaces and cupboards, along with a shallow basin.

Your home should be fitted with gas, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors already – but if you have trouble hearing them, consider getting models that raise an audible alarm with a flashing light and that alert staff at a monitoring centre.

Washing, bathing and using the toilet

Using the bathroom can be one of the trickiest parts of continuing to live at home – especially if your sense of balance isn't what it once was.

Many people find it hard to ask for help with these private things, and it's understandable if you want to keep doing them yourself for as long as possible. Fortunately, some small adjustments can make a big difference. Some of the equipment you could look into includes:

- a raised toilet seat or rails that could help you get on or off the toilet by yourself
- a bath board or a battery-powered lift to help you get in and out of the bath
- a shower seat
- grab rails around the bath or shower
- a special safety plug that limits water level
- a flood detector that alerts a monitoring centre if the bath or the sink starts to overflow
- long-handled sponges
- non-slip mats for safety, or foot-cleaning mats to save you bending.



There are also some larger adaptations that might be suitable for you, such as:

- a bath with a side opening so you can get in and out without having to climb over the side
- a level-access shower or ‘wet room’
- a wall-mounted sink at the right height for you to use in a wheelchair or mobile shower seat
- a hands-free toilet with an automatic washing and drying function that works while you’re still seated.

“I was worried about falling getting in and out of the bath – but installing a grab rail made a real difference.”

Ivy, 78



Next steps

Visit the Living Made Easy website (page 34) for details about equipment to make things easier in the bathroom.

Answering the door

If you find it difficult to get to the front door when someone knocks – or if you'd like to know who's there before you answer – think about installing one of these devices:

- a door-entry intercom, which lets you speak to the person at the door without opening it – wireless doorbells are easy to fit and come with an entry phone
- a video entry-phone, which lets you see who's at the door – some let you open the door from where you're sitting
- a police-approved key safe – a secure box for your house keys that's fitted outside your home and can only be opened by people with the code you give them
- a 'bogus caller' button that you press if you're concerned about the person at the door – you'll be connected to someone who can help.

Many DIY shops and high street retailers stock wireless doorbells and video entry systems, which a family member or handyperson could fit for you.



Next steps

See our guide **Staying safe** for more information about staying secure at home.



Helpful technology

The thought of using technology can be daunting – but lots of it is very simple to use. It can help you live independently while reassuring you and your family that you can get help quickly if you need it.

Telehealth

Telehealth systems can help you if you're living at home and have a long-term health condition. They monitor your health to save you from visiting your doctor so often – but they're always supported by a health professional.

For example, you can get a monitor that measures your blood pressure or blood sugar levels and sends the results directly to your doctor. Ask your doctor about what's available in your area.

If you're given any medical equipment on loan, check that it's covered by your home insurance policy. Not all policies cover loss of or damage to loaned medical equipment.

Telecare

Many people use personal alarms. These let you call for help if you're unwell or have a fall by pressing a button that you wear around your neck or wrist. This connects you to a call centre where you can talk to someone who can help. Some systems now also include GPS tracking for when you go out for extra peace of mind.

You can also get sensors installed in your home that automatically detect if something's wrong. For example, a pressure mat on your mattress can tell if you've been out of bed for a while during the night and automatically sends an alert in case you've fallen. These alerts can go directly to a chosen emergency contact or to a response centre.

"I think Dad and I both feel more reassured since he got a personal alarm."

Julie, 42



Next steps

Contact your local council for information about its personal alarm scheme or, if you're in England or Wales, go online at www.gov.wales/find-your-local-authority.

There are also reminder devices that can help you feel more confident in living independently – for instance, by prompting you to take your medication, turn lights off, or lock the door when you go out. These can be particularly helpful for people living with memory problems or dementia.

Other types of telecare services include:

- discreet fall detectors that can tell if you've fallen and alert a chosen contact
- motion sensors that can tell if you haven't moved about for a while, or can turn on the lights when you get out of bed
- mattress sensors that can alert a chosen contact if the bed becomes wet
- sensors that alert you or someone else if the temperature in your home rises or drops rapidly.

Ask your doctor, social worker, occupational therapist or local council staff for more information about the range of telecare services available and whether any costs apply.



Next steps

Visit the Living Made Easy website (page 34) for information about types of equipment available.

If you have an impairment

It can be harder to live independently with a sensory impairment, but there are things you can do that can help.

Sight loss

Most people experience some degree of sight loss as they get older – and some have lived with sight problems for most or all of their lives. But there are various easy, inexpensive changes you can make at home to stay as independent as possible.

- Let more natural light into your home by keeping the curtains open whenever you can.
- Improving artificial lighting can make a big difference – for example, by installing motion sensor lights in dark hallways. It can help reveal any trip hazards, such as trailing wires, loose carpets or even pets. There may be a handyperson, Home Improvement Agency or Care and Repair service that can help (see page 30).
- Change the colour scheme in your home or add coloured paint or tape markings to certain areas, such as edges and steps, to help make trip hazards more visible.



Good to know

You can order our guides in large print or audio format by calling **0800 169 65 65**.



There's a wide range of technology and equipment available to help people with sight problems, such as raised markings for appliances, and telephones with large, clear buttons.

Have your eyes tested at least every 2 years to identify any problems as soon as possible. If you're aged 60 or over, you can have a free NHS eye test.

“My sight’s got worse as I’ve got older. I’ve asked the council for a care needs assessment.”

Amit, 72



Next steps

Most local councils have a sensory impairment team who can give you advice. Contact the Royal National Institute of Blind People (page 35) for information on how to manage the impact of sight problems in your day-to-day life. The Macular Society (page 34) and the Thomas Pocklington Trust (page 35) also provide information on how to live well with a sight problem.



Hearing loss

It's common to experience some hearing loss as you get older, but there are ways to make it easier to live with.

- Many specialised devices for the home are available for people with hearing impairments, such as doorbells and smoke alarms with visible alerts - like a flashing light, so even if you can't hear them, you'll still be able to see them.
- You can get wireless smoke alarms fitted. These connect using radio signals so that if one goes off, they all will. There are also versions that use vibrating pads, which you can put under your pillow at night to alert you to an alarm.
- If you find it hard to hear a ringing telephone, look into voice-based and text-based alternatives. Or you could install a sounder beacon on your phone that flashes and makes loud signals when someone calls.



Next steps

Contact the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (page 35) for information about available products. For expert advice on smoke alarms, contact your local Fire and Rescue service.

Combined sight and hearing loss

Many people experience a degree of both sight and hearing loss in later life. This can be very isolating and difficult to cope with. Ask your doctor and other health professionals for advice on changes you can make at home, and don't be afraid to tell family and friends that you need help.

It's inevitable that your life will change in some ways as you get older – but you can continue to live independently for as long as possible by making use of the equipment and services on offer.

“I started losing my hearing a few years ago and now my sight's going too. It's not easy but I'm finding ways to manage!”

Ruby, 86



Next steps

For information on how to stay independent if you have both sight and hearing loss, contact Deafblind (page 33).



Memory loss

It can be frustrating and upsetting if you begin to notice your memory isn't what it used to be. You might even worry that it's a sign of dementia and try to hide it from friends and family.

But memory loss can be a normal part of growing older and nearly everyone will experience it at some stage. It can be a symptom of having a condition such as dementia – but it can also be caused by stress, anxiety or medication.

If you're worried about your memory, speak to your doctor. You might like to talk to your family, too.

Memory problems can make even the simplest of daily tasks difficult, but there are ways to cope. Here are some tips and tricks for making things easier around the house:

- Keep a calendar in a prominent place and write down important reminders, or use the calendar on your mobile phone or tablet.
- Fix simple labels on the front of kitchen cupboards and drawers to help remind you where things are.
- Use item locators to help you to find things such as your keys, purse or wallet easily. You attach small tags to anything you might be likely to lose, then press a button on the locator and the tag will beep and flash to help you find them.
- Think about using a digital speech recorder to remind you about things you need to do at the time you need to do them, such as taking your medication.
- Use a calendar clock that clearly shows the day, date and time to help you keep track.



Next steps

Our guide **At home with dementia** has specific tips on things you can do around your home if you're living with dementia.

The Living Made Easy website (page 34) has more information about products that can help you live more comfortably and independently if you have dementia.

Carol and Fred have found ways to make their lives easier.

Carol is the main carer for her husband, Fred.

‘Recently I’ve found there are some things I can’t do as well as I used to, which is a worry as I care for my husband.

‘My daughter suggested that we visit a local centre that demonstrates equipment to make life easier and help people manage for themselves.

‘There were lots of useful things there. I’d been having trouble lifting the kettle – now I’ve bought a one-cup kettle which is easier to manage and I can make a cuppa again, no bother!

“My daughter suggested that we visit a local centre that demonstrates equipment.”





‘We’ve also been looking at other equipment to make things easier for us around the house.

‘I called the local council to see if they could help. They sent an occupational therapist round. I told her that I particularly struggle helping Fred in and out of the bath these days and she suggested some grab rails and a bath seat. It turns out the local council is even going to provide them free – they should be fitted next month.

‘My daughter also said she was starting to worry about me falling over, so I got myself a personal alarm. It gives both of us peace of mind that if I have a fall I’ll be able to let people know.’



Getting the support you need

If you think you could benefit from adaptations to your home or from disability equipment to make things easier, contact the adult social services department of your local council.

Help from the council

Ask your local council for a care needs assessment. If the council believes you may have some level of need, you're entitled to this assessment regardless of your income, savings and age – and this must be provided for free.

The assessor looks at whether you have difficulty with day-to-day tasks and whether this has – or could have – a negative effect on your wellbeing. Your local council must aim to maximise your wellbeing, both for now and for the future.

They should also ask you if there's anything you want to be able to do – such as use public transport – and should help you achieve this where possible. If you have a carer, the assessor should involve them in the assessment and consider their views. They're also entitled to a separate carer's assessment.

The assessor should consider the emotional and social aspects of your life, including your personal care needs, your ability to maintain a habitable home and your cultural needs and support network. They should also consider any health or housing requirements you have and contact any professionals who need to be involved in your assessment.

Once the council has done the assessment, they must decide if your needs meet eligibility criteria for help. This is called having eligible needs. If so, they have a duty to offer you help and support. A care plan should be agreed with you. This sets out how the council is going to meet your needs – including any disability equipment or home adaptations. They should give you a written copy of your plan.

Even if you're not eligible for help from the council, they should still give you information and advice about services or equipment that could help you.



Next steps

See our factsheets **Finding help at home** and **Disability equipment and home adaptations** for more information. Our factsheet **Personal budgets and direct payments in social care** explains different ways to arrange your care. In Wales, see Age Cymru's versions of these factsheets.

Paying for equipment and adaptations

If you need equipment or adaptations, you might worry about the cost. But don't be put off – you might be able to get financial support.

Once you've had a care needs assessment (see pages 26-27), council staff will recommend what equipment, adaptations, care and support you need.

If they recommend minor adaptations to your home costing £1,000 or less, such as installing grab rails or lights, these will be provided and fitted free of charge. Specialist disability equipment they recommend will also be provided for free – for example, a hoist to help you in and out of bed.

If the council decides that you don't have any eligible needs, they should still give you information and advice about making life easier. If you want to get advice from a private occupational therapist, contact the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (page 35) – though it's worth bearing in mind a private occupational therapist will charge for their services.



In Wales, minor adaptations aren't means-tested and should be provided for free. However, a charge may be applied to disability equipment, depending on your circumstances.

If you want to buy equipment yourself, the Living Made Easy website (page 34) is a good starting point to see what's available. There's more information about paying for adaptations on the next few pages too.

Disabled Facilities Grants

For help with the cost of larger adaptations, you may qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). It's means-tested and there's usually an upper limit on the amount you can get. You can apply for a DFG even if the council decides you don't have eligible care and support needs, as DFG decisions are based on separate criteria.

DFGs are managed and paid by your local council's housing department – or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Northern Ireland (see page 34).

You can get a DFG if you own or rent your property, but tenants usually need their landlord's permission to carry out works. If you're a tenant in social (council or housing association) housing, you can still apply for a DFG, but your landlord might offer to pay for the adaptations themselves. They might also recommend that you move elsewhere instead, but your application shouldn't be turned down for this reason alone.



Next steps

In England, contact your local Home Improvement Agency, which may be able to help you apply. In Wales, contact your local Care and Repair. In Northern Ireland, contact the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or Radius. See pages 34-35 for contact details.

See our factsheets **Disability equipment and home adaptations** and **Home improvements and repairs** for more information, or speak to your local council. In Wales, see Age Cymru's versions of these factsheets.

HIAs and handyperson services

If it's decided that your home needs adaptations, staff from Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) can help by arranging surveys, getting estimates for the work, applying for local council assistance or other grants and supervising work to completion. Even if you can afford to pay for the work yourself, using an HIA can make it less stressful.

Some HIAs also help with small jobs, such as fitting rails. Even if you don't have an HIA in your area, there may be a handyperson service, so it can be worth asking your council.

To find out whether there's an HIA or handyperson service in your area, contact your local council's housing department or, in England and Wales, the relevant coordinating body for HIAs (page 33-34). Your local Age UK or Age Cymru might also offer a service or be able to direct you to one.



HIAs aren't available in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, contact the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (page 34).



Boosting your income

It's important to claim all the money you're entitled to. Each year, up to £3 billion of state benefits goes unclaimed – so make sure you're not missing out.

If you need help with care, you might qualify for a disability benefit – either Personal Independence Payment if you're under State Pension age, or Attendance Allowance if you're over State Pension age. Neither benefit is means-tested, so your income and savings won't be considered.

If you're on a low income, you might be entitled to a means-tested benefit, such as Pension Credit or Universal Credit.

In addition to benefits, you may have other options to help you pay for adaptations, such as:

- asking your local council whether you're entitled to help with repairs, improvement or adaptations (see page 28)
- applying for charitable funding or a grant – Turn2us (page 35) has more information.



Next steps

See our guide **More money in your pocket** to find out more. Age Cymru and Age NI have their own versions. You can also visit www.ageuk.org.uk/benefitscheck to use our online benefits calculator.

Moving to more suitable accommodation

If adaptations aren't possible or wouldn't meet your needs, it might be time to consider moving.

Deciding to move isn't easy – so talk to friends and family or get independent advice if you like. It's understandable to feel anxious at the thought of leaving a home that's familiar, especially if it holds lots of happy memories. You might feel as if a chapter of your life is closing, or that you'll be forced to give up some of your independence.

However, many people find they enjoy moving somewhere with more support – for example, sheltered housing.

There's a range of housing options available. Deciding what's best for you depends on your needs, finances, current accommodation, and what's available in your preferred area.

If you have care needs, you can ask your local council for a care needs assessment. This can help work out what sort of accommodation would best suit your needs. The council should also provide information and advice about suitable options in your area.



Next steps

See our guide **Housing options** for more information.

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide information and advice for people in later life through our Age UK Advice Line, publications and website.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open 7 days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

In Wales, contact Age Cymru Advice: **0300 303 44 98**

www.agecymru.wales

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: **0808 808 7575**

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland: **0800 124 4222**

www.agescotland.org.uk

Deafblind

Offers services, information and advice to people who are deafblind or have both sight and hearing loss.

Tel: **0800 132320**

Text: **07903 572885**

Email: **info@deafblind.org.uk**

www.deafblind.org.uk

Home Improvement Agencies

Help older and disabled people organise repairs, improvements and adaptations to their home.

In England, contact **Foundations**

Tel: **0300 124 0315**

wwwFOUNDATIONS.org.uk

www.findmyhia.org.uk

In Wales, contact **Care and Repair Cymru**

Tel: **02920 107580**

www.careandrepair.org.uk

Living Made Easy

Provides information about disability equipment and assisted products.

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Macular Society

Offers information and support to help people adapt to life with sight loss.

Tel: **0300 3030 111**

www.macularsociety.org

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Gives information on grants for home improvements in Northern Ireland.

Tel: **03448 920 900**

www.nihe.gov.uk

Radius

Provides free support and advice for people in Northern Ireland applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

Tel: **0330 123 0888**

www.radiushousing.org

RiDC (Research Institute for Disabled Consumers)

Offers independent information to older and disabled consumers.

Tel: **020 7427 2460**

www.ridc.org.uk

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT)

Member organisation that can help you find an occupational therapist and advise you on home adaptations or equipment.

Tel: **020 3141 4600**

www.rcot.co.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

Offers information and support to people who are blind or partially sighted.

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

www.rnib.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact **RNIB Northern Ireland**

Tel: **028 9032 9373**

www.rnib.org.uk/nations/northern-ireland

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

National organisation offering information and support to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Tel: **0808 808 0123**

Email: **contact@rnid.org.uk**

www.rnid.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Campaigns to save lives and prevent injuries.

Tel: **0121 248 2000**

www.rospace.com

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Provides information, care and support to people with sight loss in the UK.

Tel: **020 8995 0880**

www.pocklington.org.uk

Turn2us

Helps people access the benefits, grants and other financial help available to them.

www.turn2us.org.uk

What should I do now?

You might want to read some of our relevant information guides and factsheets, such as:

- **Getting help at home**
- **Housing options**

You can find all of our guides and factsheets on our website, along with lots more useful information. Visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** to get started.

You can order free printed copies of any guide or factsheet by emailing **orders@ageuk.org.uk** or calling our Advice Line on **0800 169 65 65**. Our friendly advisers can also help with any questions.

All of our publications are available on request in large print and audio formats.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the below box, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



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