

RNIB

supporting blind and
partially sighted people

Staying in your own home



About the “Confident living” series

The “Confident living” series of leaflets offers basic information to help people with sight problems get on with their lives.

Other titles in the series include:

Benefits of registering as blind or partially sighted

Community care

Finding a residential home

Money for pensioners

On the move

Shopping made easier

Each title in the series is free to individuals and is available in print, audio and braille format. To order your copy, please contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 (all calls charged at local rate).

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As we get older, most of us want to carry on living in our own home, rather than moving into sheltered housing, residential care or moving in with relatives.

This guide provides practical advice to make staying in your own home easier. We provide basic information on making sure you feel safe, keeping warm, getting help to carry out repairs and improvements and adapting your home.

Communication

Maintaining contact with the outside world is very important. A few simple steps could mean you don't have to worry about becoming isolated in your own home.

Telephones

A telephone is essential if you live on your own. Our online shop sells big button telephones that are easier to see. To find out about the full range of products or to order any items, call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit our online shop, rnib.org.uk/shop

If you're concerned about the cost of installation or line rental your local authority may be able to help you. There are also various schemes that provide low cost telephone access. You can call British Telecom on 118 500 or your own telecom provider for more details.

Entry phones

You may want to install an entry phone system in your home to help you feel more secure. The entry phone is an audio telephone which allows you to speak to visitors, without leaving the comfort of your home.

Community alarms

Getting help if you're in an emergency is important. Community alarms allow you to call for help even if you can't get to a phone. You will be given a button on a pendant, which you can wear at all times. When you press the button, staff at a 24-hour response centre will alert the best person to help you, whether it's your neighbour, a relative, friend or the emergency services. Contact your local authority for more details.

Computers

A computer allows you to shop or search for information without leaving your home. Keyboards with large bold characters, software for magnifying the computer screen or software that allows the computer to generate synthetic speech, can be purchased from our online shop. Call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for more information.

If you would like advice about how to use computers, and you have little or no vision, you can contact the Technology Information Support team on 0845 900 0015. Or our computer volunteers can help you with a range of computer problems, if the computers are for personal use, including software installation. To contact Volunteer Development and Operations, call 0845 604 2341.

Getting around your home safely

There are a number of changes you could make to your home to make it safer and easier to get around. There are also many aids and gadgets which might help you live more safely and independently.

Use of colour contrast

One way you could make things stand out more clearly in your home is through colour contrasts. If you paint your door a contrasting colour to the door handle or wall, it will make it easier to see. A handrail will also stand out more clearly from your stairs if you paint it a contrasting colour. The best contrast is black and white.

With the aid of an electrician, you can also make switches and sockets colour contrast with your walls. Or you could add raised markings or brightly coloured markers (called bump-ons) to your appliances, to help you see and feel the controls. Manufacturers can also supply you with tactile adaptations for kitchen appliances.

Our publication, "See for yourself: make the most of your sight" contains more information on how people with sight loss can make the most of their remaining vision, and it is free to individuals.

Our product guides also contain information about products which can help you with everyday living. These guides are free. For more information or to order a copy, call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit rnib.org.uk/shop

Social services

Your local social services department may be able to offer you a range of help and support (if you meet the criteria), such as with housework, preparing meals or personal care. For more information about registering, you can order our booklet, “The benefits of registering as blind or partially sighted” by calling our Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

Home improvement agencies

Home improvement agencies, often known as “Care and repair” or “Staying put”, are available throughout the UK. Their staff will visit your home and help you decide what changes you could make and how you could pay for them. There is more information in a later section called “Funding changes to your home”. Your local social services or housing department will be able to tell you if there is a home improvement agency in your area.

Potential hazards around the home

You need to feel free from the risk of accidents if you want to continue living in your own home. Often just a few small changes will make you feel safer. Fixing broken handrails on the stairs, putting non-slip flooring in your bathroom or improving the lighting in your kitchen could all help.

You can ask an occupational therapist or rehabilitation officer for advice on other safety measures you can take. There is more information on ways you could get help paying for this in “Funding changes to your home”. Contact your local social services department or call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for more information.

Fire alarms

One of the chief dangers in the home is fire. You can install smoke alarms to reduce the risk of fire. They are relatively inexpensive and quite easy to fit. Or you can contact your local fire service, who will often carry out fire safety checks for free.

Heating

There are ways you can improve the heating in your home so you can keep warm without paying higher bills. Specially adapted products are available from our shop or fuel suppliers. To find out more, call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit our online shop, rnib.org.uk/shop

Services from fuel suppliers

You can ask your fuel supplier to check your gas appliances, such as boilers, cookers and central heating systems, regularly to make sure they're safe. You may be entitled to a free annual safety check. You can also ask them to put your name on their priority service register, agree to use a password if they visit you at home and provide you with bills in large print, audio or braille.

Home energy efficiency grants

You can apply for grants to carry out work to make your home warmer and keep fuel costs down. These are available from the **Warm Front Scheme** (freephone 0800 316 6011 or textphone 0800 072 0156) and the **British Gas Here to Help** programme (call 08453 30 48 97 or visit rnib.org.uk/heretohelp).

The **Energy Saving Trust** can discuss grants and offers available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (call free 0800 51 20 12 or visit energysavingtrust.org.uk).

Lighting

Lighting is important for everyone, yet we often overlook it. Making simple changes to the lighting in your home could make a huge difference to your daily life.

We've found the areas where accidents most commonly occur are on the stairs and in the kitchen. Improving the lighting in these areas will help reduce the risk of trips and falls. The stairs are often more dimly lit than the rooms leading off them but you can avoid this by making sure your lighting can be switched on and off at the top and bottom of the stairs.

It's also very important to have good lighting in the kitchen, so you avoid accidents when you're working. You can fix lights to cupboards or shelves so they shine directly onto your worktop.

You'll find different lights are useful for different tasks. Adjustable lamps are useful for reading, knitting and writing tasks, as they shine directly onto what you need to see. Fluorescent bulbs, which produce more light, might be more expensive to start with but are cheaper to run in the long term. We sell a range of task, floor and portable lighting, including some fluorescent bulbs. For more information, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit rnib.org.uk/shop for details.

Outside your home

You might also want to make changes to the outside of your home so it's safer to move around. Repairing broken paths, improving the lighting near your front door and choosing door handles which are easy to see and grasp could make it easier to move around outside.

If you're into gardening, it might be worth removing plants or weeds that are causing an obstruction. You might also find that large, brightly coloured tools are easier to use.

If you're outside on a bright day you may find the light gets into your eyes, even if you're wearing sunglasses. You could use a brimmed hat or tinted glasses with side shields. We sell tinted over glasses (over shields) at our shop and they're available from many low vision services.

For more information, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or visit rnib.org.uk/shop for more details.

Funding changes to your home

Paying for repairs, improvements and adaptations to your home could be a major concern. If you do not have substantial savings but you would benefit from improvements to your home, contact social services and ask them to arrange for a social worker to assess your needs. You can find their phone number in the phone book or from BT Directory Enquiries on 118 500.

If you don't want to contact social services yourself, someone else can do it for you, such as a friend, relative, doctor, home care worker or an organisation, such as RNIB. If you need any help, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

Benefits

If you're not able to pay for work yourself, you could try to increase your weekly income by claiming state benefits. Claiming Income Support or a community care grant might enable you to stay in your own home. You may also be entitled to Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. You can contact your local benefits agency office or our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for more information.

Funding from social services

Social services have a duty to help provide adaptations or facilities for people with disabilities, if you meet their criteria. In practice, housing authorities will generally take responsibility for structural alterations and fixed equipment; while social services may deal with forms of equipment that can be removed with few structural modifications and are not covered by Disabled Facilities Grants, such as stair-lifts.

Disabled Facilities Grant

This is a mandatory grant for home adaptations: up to £30,000 in England, £36,000 in Wales and £25,000 in Northern Ireland. This grant is available to you if:

- you are disabled
- you experience problems accessing your home or using the basic amenities within it, such as the kitchen or bathroom or
- you need to improve the safety of your home by improving the lighting or installing blinds
- you have a disability and need to adapt your home to make it easier to care for a dependent and
- your local authority agrees that the works are reasonable and can be carried out.

Disabled Facilities Grants are means-tested, so your local authority will need to know about your income and savings. However, there is no means test for families of disabled children less than 19 years old.

You may also be eligible for other grants to repair, improve or adapt your home. Contact your social services department for further details about discretionary grants.

Borrowing against the value of your home

If you own your home and do not qualify for extra financial help, you could approach your building society or bank for an ordinary loan. Or, if you are older, you can apply for an interest-only loan, based on the value of your home. Some fees will apply.

You should always take independent legal and financial advice before making any commitment. For more information on how to get financial help or housing advice, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

Insuring your home

It makes sense to have good household contents insurance cover. Age UK run a Home Contents Insurance Scheme for older people. Call 0845 606 5075 for details.

Further information

RNIB Helpline

Our Helpline is your direct line to the support, advice and products you need. We'll help you to find out what's available in your area and beyond, both from RNIB and other organisations. Whether you want to know more about your eye condition, buy a product from our shop, join our library, find out about possible benefit entitlements, be put in touch with a trained counsellor, or make a general enquiry, we're only a call away.

t: 0303 123 9999

helpline@rnib.org.uk

We're ready to answer your call Monday to Friday 8.45am to 6.00pm and Saturday 9.00am to 4.00pm. Outside these times leave us a message and we'll get back to you as soon as possible. Standard rate call charges apply.

Become a Member of RNIB

Join our community of RNIB Members and make a difference to your life and to the lives of other people with sight loss. Receive regular information through Vision magazine, attend member events, chat to others through the online forum or participate in telephone book clubs. Call RNIB Membership on 0303 1234 555 or visit rnib.org.uk/membership to join or to find out more.

RNIB Helpline

0303 123 9999

helpline@rnib.org.uk

**If you, or someone you know, is
living with sight loss, we're here
to help.**

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