

Useful links

Equalities and Human Rights Commission - HYPERLINK "<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>" <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

Directgov - <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HealthAndWellBeing/index.htm>

RADAR - <http://www.radar.org.uk/radarwebsite/>

SCOPE - www.scope.org.uk/

Multiple Sclerosis Society - www.mssociety.org.uk/

British Polio - www.britishpolio.org.uk/

Spinal Injuries Association - HYPERLINK "<http://www.spinal.co.uk/>" www.spinal.co.uk/

Spina Bifida - HYPERLINK "<http://www.spinabifidaassociation.org/>" www.spinabifidaassociation.org/

Arthritis and Rheumatism - www.arthritisresearchuk.org/

Physical and mobility impairment factsheet

A physical impairment is any condition or problem which makes it difficult for a person to carry out everyday activities without some degree of assistance or adaptation. People with physical impairments often use mobility aids such as crutches, canes, walking frames, wheelchairs, orthotic appliances and artificial limbs to obtain mobility.

Physical disability has many causes. It may be congenital, such as cerebral palsy, or caused by a chronic illness such as multiple sclerosis, arthritis, or diabetes. It may be the result of an infection such as meningitis or polio. Some, often younger people, have accidents or injuries which may damage the brain, nerves and/or muscles. They may suffer from loss of limbs. Strokes are responsible

for many, usually older, people becoming disabled.

Many people have **hidden' disabilities** such as heart and lung disease, cancer or epilepsy. These conditions may not be apparent but can be very disabling and seriously affect the person's quality of life.

The majority of people with a mobility impairment are not dependent on a wheelchair. Some may need to use a wheelchair or a mobility scooter intermittently.

Being physically unable to do something does not necessarily cause dependency. People may simply require services to be provided differently. Physical barriers in our society cause the majority of problems for people with physical

disabilities, i.e. doorways that are not wide enough, steps, etc.

The effects of physical or mobility impairment can result in a steep learning curve for families. Families should be mindful that while these conditions require adjustments to their lives, they are not insurmountable.

People with mobility difficulties may also have other problems such as sensory difficulties, or in some cases intellectual impairment. For help with communicating with those who are hard of hearing or have visual impairment, please see relevant fact sheet.

Speech impairment might also be a factor.



Useful tips

1) Remember, it's only the speech that's impaired.

Don't assume you must speak slowly or use simple language around someone with a speech impediment, any more than you would someone in a wheelchair. Chances are they can hear you just fine, and understand as well. It may just take them a while to get their responses off their tongue.

Stuttering comes with its own subset of concerns; a stutterer may come off as nervous or exceptionally shy. Do not assume this to be true.

(2) Don't be afraid to ask them to repeat.

Everyone wants to be heard and understood, so if you didn't catch what someone with a speech impediment said, let them know so they can make their point. No need for guesswork.

(3) But don't try other corrections.

It is tempting to play armchair speech therapist and say "slow down" or "take a deep breath"; this does not actually help, and often only makes the person nervous, which aggravates the problem.

(4) Be mindful about the phone.

Verbal communication is enhanced by visual communication; the way we stand and gesture says as much as our words. On the telephone, someone with a speech impediment is reduced to their weakest element.

Some people with speech impediments may be self-conscious about use of the phone. But, again, do not

assume; many people with speech impediments enjoy talking and interfacing, even by phone.

(5) Don't finish sentences.

Someone with a speech impediment would prefer to get the words out on their own. You wouldn't want someone second-guessing your thoughts.

Use an open ear and listen to the words and content, not the context, when a speech impediment surfaces, and soon enough the impediment will cause little trouble.

For help with communicating with those who are hard of hearing or have visual impairment, please see relevant fact sheet.

Disabled facility grants



Disabled Facility Grants are available for work that is needed to support a person with a disability to live more independently at home.

The grant can be used to finance a range of adaptations to ensure that disabled owner-occupiers, tenants and children with a disability have access to facilities within their home, such as a bedroom, bath or shower and kitchen. Typical adaptations include the provision of a level access shower, installation of a stairlift and provision of external ramps etc.

They are means tested and require an initial assessment to be carried out by the Occupational Therapists at Dorset County Council.



The maximum individual DFG is £30,000. Demand for DFGs is high and sometimes there is a waiting list for grant assistance. Details of the DFG can be found in the councils' grants and loans policies.

We have also produced a simple disabled facilities grant information booklet [607kb] (opens in a new window) which outlines the first steps in applying for a DFG.



Wheelchair user

"Wheelchair user" refers to a person using a wheelchair. Never use the terms "wheelchair bound," or "confined to a wheelchair." Wheelchairs enable people to have mobility

Did you know?

It is estimated that between 5% and 8% of disabled people are wheelchair users.

Different environments can cause different problems for a person with a physical impairment

Useful tips

- Don't assume someone wants help – always ask
- Try to put yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level
- Speak directly to the person and not their family member or friend
- Don't lean on or push the wheelchair unless asked to, or been given permission to do so
- Offer to open heavy doors
- Provide a seat for someone who cannot stand for long



Disability Discrimination Act

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 aims to end the discrimination that many disabled people face. This Act has been significantly extended, including by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. It now gives disabled people rights in the areas of:

- employment
- education
- access to goods, facilities and services, including larger private clubs and land-based transport services
- buying or renting land or property, including making it easier for disabled people to rent property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations
- functions of public bodies, for example issuing of licences

The Act requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. It also allows the government to set minimum standards so that disabled people can use public transport easily. A new piece of legislation, the Equalities Act 2010, is being introduced on 1st October which will extend and clarify the rights of people with disabilities, as well as the duties of service providers.

Some useful definitions of paralysis.

Paralysis - means a weakness or loss of muscle function. Various terms are used which describe the distribution of the paralysis.

Hemiplegia - is the paralysis of one side of the body often as a result of a stroke or cerebral palsy. There may be an associated impairment of intellect, speech or sensory loss.

Paraplegia - the paralysis of the lower extremities and part or all of the trunk muscles. Often there is a loss of sensation in paralysed limbs and other effects such as muscle spasms, pain and loss of bowel and bladder control.

Quadriplegia - occurs when there is damage to the spinal cord in the Cervical Region. This will cause impairment to the hands and arms in addition to the effects of paraplegia.

Just a few mobility impairments

A Stroke - is a common cause of disability and is usually caused by a blood clot forming in the brain. Its effects are variable but often cause a hemiplegia, with speech difficulties and sometimes emotional changes.

Cerebral Palsy - A disorder usually occurring before, or sometimes during birth, that prevents sufferers from controlling their muscles normally. This can result in ataxia, poorly controlled and involuntary movements of the muscles which can make everyday activities like walking or holding a cup of tea difficult.

Any combination of muscles can be involved in cerebral palsy, often causing a hemiplegia, but the whole of the body, including control of the head and neck can be affected. Swallowing can also be a problem. Speech is sometimes difficult; it may be slow and words may be slurred. It may make it difficult for a person to make themselves understood.

Multiple Sclerosis - A disorder of the nervous system that attacks the brain and spinal cord and causes deterioration of the nerve tissue. Symptoms are very varied and depend on which nerves have been affected. There may be paralysis, disorders of speech, changed sensation (e.g. pins and needles or numbness) problems with bladder and bowel control, or visual problems.

Polio - A disease which causes an acute febrile illness. In a few people it damages nerve tissue in the spinal cord, and results in a varying degree of paralysis of individual muscle groups. It can also affect the respiratory muscles. New cases of polio in the UK have been rare since the introduction of immunisation in the late 1950's, but many survivors are still living with the late effects of polio, or Post Polio Syndrome.