

## Motor neurone disease - independence at home

Motor neurone disease (MND) causes a number of common practical difficulties in everyday life. Household items can become difficult or impossible to use. There is a range of devices and aids that can make life easier, as well as some common sense approaches to comfort around the home.

### Chairs

The support provided by a chair, and its height and stability, are important for people with MND. It will help if you:

- Make a chair more comfortable by using cushions or a headrest
- Use firm upright armchairs
- Use chair blocks to raise the height of an existing chair
- Use manual or electrically operated riser or recliner chairs
- Use pressure relief cushions
- Ask an occupational therapist or physiotherapist for advice.

### Beds

Comfort and manoeuvrability in bed can be a major problem. Try:

- Bed blocks to raise the height of the bed and make it easier to get in and out
- A monkey pole, backrest, posture pillows or sheepskins
- Mattress elevators to raise a person from the lying to the sitting position
- A deep mattress or other specialist mattresses, such as airbeds, waterbeds or net beds
- An adjustable bed, manual or electric
- A mobile or overhead hoist. A careful assessment by a therapist is vital to ensure that the correct hoist is chosen for the comfort and safety of both the MND person and the carer.

### Working height

Tasks such as eating or writing become easier if the forearms are supported at a suitable working height. Try using:

- An adjustable cantilever table or a box (cut to the required height) placed on the table
- A bed tray (with small legs) on the table
- Forearm supports, or mobile arm supports (attached to a wheelchair).

### Tools and utensils

To accommodate weakened hand muscles:

- Enlarge the handles of items like cutlery and toothbrushes by using epoxy resin to mould to the shape required or rubber tubing to slip over handles.
- Use a strap, with a pocket, which fits across the palm of the hand.
- Choose lightweight items.
- Ask your occupational therapist for advice.

## Light and power

You can improve access if you:

- Install rocker or touch pad switches instead of conventional switches
- Bring sockets up to a convenient height by using extension leads.

## Alarms, intercoms and computers

Room-to-room communication and alarm calls can be arranged with:

- Simple units like plug-in baby alarms or sophisticated units that incorporate radio, video, music, fire and burglar alarms
- Telephone systems that will automatically contact emergency services, family members or friends
- Beepers that can be adapted to call for assistance from both inside and outside the house
- A buzzer or doorbell, wired to a light touch switch or pressure pad
- Alarms and computers can often be operated by remote control
- Microswitches that can be triggered by movement in any part of the body.

## Electrical devices

Electrical devices are available to open and close doors, windows and curtains and to turn the radio or TV on and off. All these devices help maintain independence, but it may be easier and cheaper to use readily available devices, such as plug-in timers to control heaters or switch on lights. Ask your occupational therapist for advice.

## Door knobs and locks

It often helps to provide extra leverage on knobs and keys by:

- Using a multipurpose knob turner
- Installing larger knobs on door locks
- Enlarging key grips.

## Telephones

There are many telephone devices available. You could:

- Use a hands-free telephone, so you can talk without lifting the handset.
- Use a telephone with the ability to store phone numbers that can be dialled by pressing just one button.
- Use a cordless telephone that is light and easy to operate.
- Contact the Telstra Australia Disabilities Program Branch who can provide special telephones.

## Carrying

With weakened muscles, carrying things can be a problem. Try using:

- An apron with big pockets or a bag slung diagonally over the shoulder or round the waist
- A tray with non-slip surfaces, such as Dycem
- Purpose-built, stable trolleys.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre (see the Local Services Directory)
- Motor Neurone Disease Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9830 2122 or 1800 806 632

- Specialists such as neurologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and psychologists (your doctor can refer you)
- Home care nurses (contact your local council)
- Social workers (contact your local council).

## Things to remember

- As MND progresses, the person may find that they have difficulty with everyday implements and devices in their home.
- The right aids and equipment can help people with MND retain some independence and quality of life in their own homes.
- There are professionals who can help identify the appropriate resources, aids, equipment and support.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Motor Neurone Disease Association of Victoria

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