

Inspector Gadget's helpful hints

by Simon (someone who has been there)

[This file of great tips was written for someone living in the UK. Some notes have been made in [] to translate to US.]

General Principles

I spent 80 days on the trot (not with the trots!) in Bradford [England] hospitals in 2007. I could barely push myself up in the bed, I couldn't walk. Even getting dressed was difficult. I had been used to an active life before this illness, and the changes were tremendous. My wife and I had a Standard Poodle (4.5 stones of muscular activity and stupidity) and we'd had the garden landscaped to give me an "allotment" area. I had been a GP in Bradford for nearly 20 years, and then, all of a sudden, I was on a sickness pension, and I was retired in my mid-40s. I wouldn't have been able to do the job even if I had wanted to (my difficulties with balance, speech and vision, and not being allowed to drive would have stopped anyone from wanting me to work for, or with, them). **Not** what my wife and I had planned for.

These are some suggestions of things that you could do to give yourself some of your old life back. They should make things safer, easier, and life a bit more enjoyable, worthwhile, and more fulfilling. My wife and I have tried many of these ourselves, and found out about the others. You will need to buy some items. They are usually worth it if they give you back part of your life. Most are not especially expensive and some are even free.

Do things **SLOWLY** and **DELIBERATELY**, and **WATCH** what you are doing. This helps to avoid dropping things. Don't try to turn around quickly especially when standing up. You will tumble and fall.

Only try to carry a few things at a time or they often slip away from your grip. Take a firm hold before trying to pick anything up.

Tidy up as you go

PACE yourself

Don't set out to do too much

Aids to memory (I nearly forgot this one!)

Always carry a pencil or pen and paper with you (writing pens which have a thick nib make you write quite big and this helps, otherwise it is all just a smudge!). Use a Dictaphone where appropriate.

Psychological

- To do lists
- Done lists
- Life will change completely. Try to accept this and carry on with some of the things that you used to enjoy doing, and try to find some new ones that you can manage to do now

Household

- Spare pairs of glasses (reading and or distance)
- Large magnifying glasses that hang around your neck
- Chairs with higher seats and arm supports
- Avoid chairs with wheels (like desk chairs) as they skid away from you
- Suitable lighting in rooms, by chairs, in kitchens, and by the bed
- Foot care (NHS or Private)
- Careline (alarm system) [FirstAlert in some parts of the US; contact your local EMT company or Senior Citizen Organization]
- Easy 5 'phone (RNIB), Home Roamer-phone with big buttons (RNIB), Remote controls, MP3 player (buttons may be too small)

- Trevor tray (L), Man bag (L) that goes over shoulder or around waist
- Some shirts without buttons; poppers are ok
[companies that sell special clothing can be found on the internet; try using a search engine with a list along the lines of 'clothing adaptive special needs' or something specific to your need; at least one patient has found clothing at www.easyaccess.com to be helpful]
- Slip-on shoes, Elastic laces, long handled shoehorn
- Support rails, Suction Handles (C)
- Stair-lift (**this** is the most expensive item that you can buy, by a long way, but it does give you a 2 storey life again). You can apply for these to be provided by Social Services, but it can be a very long time till fitting of the lift. If you are able to approach the company directly, it takes just a few weeks to get it designed and fitted. Examine the service and repair contract that is supplied and check that the lift fits into your home. I had more than a month with a hospital bed in the downstairs dining room, washing in the kitchen sink with the help of the Homecare ladies! Not fun, I can tell you!).
- Long handled grabber for picking things up or getting things that are out of reach
- Long-handled things in general (shoe-horn, dustpan and brush)
- Powered Toothbrush, Bath-bench/seat (C) Shower Caddy (L), Bath and shower mats
- Scissors
- Help with jobs around house (women that do in Old English).

Kitchen

- Have things that you need (and actually use!) at a suitable height, especially in the kitchen. We can't rummage in low cupboards for things, especially when they are needed NOW.
- Damp cloth under bowls to stop slippage
- Cool mitts oven gloves (variable lengths; just hands or the whole length of the forearm)

- Chopping boards with grooves around the outside to catch any wandering bits (hachoir boards with top curved inwards are good)
- Onion chopping technique (peel off the outermost couple of layers; bend these and the dry skin comes away quite easily. No trying to peel off little bits of onion skin any longer).
- Being the sous-chef
- Having everything ready for when he/she comes home so that he/she (or even you!) can start cooking without having to prepare things
- Measure requirements for recipes and put things in containers BEFORE you start cooking
- Good grips (Jug with graduations, tongs), Halogen hob (L), Bread-maker (for just making the dough, or for baking the loaves too), Silicone “tins”(these are great but **not** rigid so be careful with liquid mixtures, Stem-less wine glasses (Riedel) or simply tumblers (coloured glass e.g.blue) is easier to see, Beakers with tops and teats, Avoid inherently unstable articles esp. mugs, Artificial edge that you can fit on plates and bowls (OT), Edges to surfaces, Tony tray, Tina tray, Non-slip coating especially on Tony and Tina trays(RNIB). Non-slip mug/cup/glass holder (RNIB). Dish-washer (machine or human). Silicone spatulas (LC), metal spatulas (ones that are ok on non-stick (his/her) pans). Knife sharpener, tin opener, wide-necked funnels, little containers for your tiny ingredients, big ones for larger amounts
- Small containers (glass, plastic or earthenware) for previously measured ingredients

Garden

- Start with relatively simple plants and vegetables or fruit that doesn't need too much looking after.
- Kneeler for garden (C), Raised beds (H), No-dig gardening
- Help with garden jobs

Out and About

- “Case the Joint and sus ‘em out”-send spies, relatives, or friends to pubs, clubs, and restaurants before you go yourself. They can check out accessibility and where the “loos” are (the most important room in the house) and whether you can get to them!
- Theatres and Concert Halls often give discounts if you are in a chair or need a walking frame (pushers/attendants often get in for free or for a reduced fee)
- Delta frame (a go-faster walking frame with three wheels and it collapses flat for transport), GNER service to help the disabled, Hire of wheelchairs /other equipment needed, Walking sticks (collapsible or otherwise), Re-home dog, Taxis that can take wheelchairs

Computer

- Stickers with large black letters on a yellow background for your keyboard (RNIB), which makes it like playing Scrabble.
- Narrator speech program (comes with some versions of Windows)
- Surplus buttons on keyboard (you’re a bit stuck with these but I ping them off with a penknife. They go back on if necessary),
- Continuous internet access (giving you an extra phone line as it doesn’t affect incoming or outgoing calls e.g. BT Internet),
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Rolling ball rodent (not too easy if you have twitchy fingers)

Shopping

Internet Shopping (Tesco, Sainsbury’s etc), Lakeland, Le Creuset (pans that work on Halogen Hobs), Scott’s of Stow, R.N.I.B., Chestercare, Harrod’s Horticultural

Think about the possibility of different arrangements at home
Changing sides of the bed can make it much easier to get to the

bathroom (especially in the dark), changing the side of door hinges so that the doors open the other way

You may well need to think radically about how your house is laid out. Moving things around often costs nothing apart from a bit of stiffness. A few of the possibilities are expensive but most are relatively cheap.

Set targets which are mainly achievable, especially when you first go home. Certainly watch TV, read, or listen to music for some of the time, but you need something else as well. Ask other people and patients about things that have helped them, the accessibility of places, and staff attitudes etc.

One of my main interests before becoming ill was cooking, especially baking my own bread. I have managed to arrange things at home and get the necessary items (I already had a bread-maker, and the Halogen hob is great- flameless cooking!) to allow me to start again. I also do some gardening, although not as much as before. I manage to have some vegetables and soft fruits growing at home despite my difficulties in getting about. We are having some grab rails fitted around the back of the house so that I can get about more safely.

Retiring twenty years early because of illness was not in our plans and we have tried to make the best of things when we able to.