

Staying mobile

Jayne Wright looks at some of the options available for those with mobility problems

THERE ARE plenty of positives to getting older, but there are also downsides. Most of us have aches and pains and find some of the actions of daily living a challenge. We also often have older parents, family or friends who have even steeper challenges.

Many people are reluctant to adopt even the most straightforward of aids like a walking stick either through embarrassment or trying to overcome

difficulties with sheer determination. Arthritis is the most common cause of immobility, with more than nine million of us suffering from this condition, mainly with mild to moderate symptoms. It is worth overcoming any reluctance to use aids and techniques as it is not a sign of weakness to use them but sheer common-sense, as some of the simplest ideas can make a big difference to your quality of life.

Getting around

Sometimes a simple walking stick can make a world of difference; there is no need to have something that looks medical equipment. There are many convenient folding sticks that look fashionably feminine or stylishly masculine.

Walking poles can also be very helpful. They tend to improve your walking position by making it more upright, which can help to ease pressure on the hips and knees. They are excellent on more uneven ground, making you feel much safer and less likely to stumble. The additional benefit is that they also work your arms while walking.

When considering choosing a walking aid it is important to make sure it helps the individual to feel safe and confident and it suits their lifestyle. Most wheeled walking frames come either with a tray, basket or bag for carrying things around. Many will also have seats that can be used to

take a short rest. Walking frames are usually adjustable and come in a range of sizes. It is essential to get the right equipment, making sure it fits properly and the individual knows how to use it. Ill-fitting equipment can make it harder and often less safe to get around. Therefore it is best to seek advice from an expert if an individual needs anything more than a simple walking stick.

It is always worth getting the opinion of an occupational therapist if you are having problems, particularly with mobility or personal care. Your GP surgery should have access to these services although you may have to wait a while. For further information also go to the website: (www.arthritiscare.org.uk) or (www.arc.org.uk).

Shopping and cooking

Going to a crowded supermarket, doing the shopping and having to carry it to the car, bus or all the way home can be tiring and aggravate any pain. Online shopping, if one has access to a computer, can quickly solve this problem. With a click of the button you can have shopping delivered to your home at a convenient time.

As well as shopping online most of us do want to get out. It is best to go shopping at a time when you feel you have the most energy, which for most people is early in the morning.

Whether you are preparing day-to-day

meals or something more elaborate for a dinner party there are lots of gadgets that can help. A slow cooker can be very useful, for instance. You can prepare your food in the morning and leave it to cook during the day allowing you to take a rest before your guests arrive.

Sitting down whilst preparing your food is an excellent way of conserving your energy and limiting your pain. This can be done at your table, but an alternative is to use a perching stool at your work surfaces. The key is to plan ahead and have all the items you need to hand before you sit down to prepare your meal.

If gripping cutlery and utensils is difficult due to pain and reduced strength in your grip there is a lot you can do. Large handled cutlery, knives, graters and a non-slip mat placed underneath bowls

or chopping boards, preventing them from slipping and therefore reducing the need to hold onto them, may be the answer for you.

These are available in most good supermarkets and some DIY stores. More specialised equipment, like a spill-not or a Dycem bottle or jar opener, are very useful but need to be purchased from specialist equipment shops.

You can also get cylindrical gripping material that can be cut to size to make ordinary sized pens or cutlery easier to grip.

The Culinare one-touch can opener and jar opener is excellent. Align them over the tin or can you want to open, press the button, and the can opener/jar opener does the rest! You can order these online at: (www.lakeland.co.uk), tel: 01539 488100.

Another item of electrical equipment that that can reduce the strain on your joints is an electric steamer. These are light weight and therefore easy to lift and carry, plus the steaming action is gentle on the food being cooked, therefore maintaining its nutritional value.

On the hob you can use baskets inside the saucepan. This technique again reduces the weight you have to lift and carry around your kitchen. Simply place the food to be



The Amplicomms alarm clock

cooked inside a basket with a large handle and the put the basket inside the saucepan on your cooker. Once the food is cooked and place the food on your plate then slide the saucepan off the cooker to drain.

If you have a full size kettle it can be hard to lift when full. It is a good strategy to buy a smaller kettle if you usually make drinks for one or two. You can always keep the main kettle in reserve for when you have guests.

Personal care

Here are a couple of new ideas that might help. The first is the Personal Poppitt, which helps with those irritating blister packs for pills. This little device pops them out using a lever system and catches the pills in a collection tray. You can order them at: (www.poppitts.co.uk), tel: 01425 614743.

If you are hard of hearing or have sight problems then a digital alarm clock from Amplicomms is super loud with a powerful vibrating pillow pad and flashing lights to wake those with hearing loss.

The new TCL300 from Amplicomms will suit people with sight loss, too, with a

jumbo digital display featuring huge fonts, making it easy to read.

The clock features tone adjustment for high/low frequency sounds as well as controls for the volume and vibration levels. Should one of the waking methods not appeal, each one can be individually turned off. If you really want to hear, see and feel it all over again TCL300 has a Snooze Button. The RRP is £39.99. You can order by phone on 0800 032 1301, or at: (www.hearingdirect.com).

Leisure

Books, particularly hardback non-fiction volumes, can be heavy to hold. A digital book system such as a Kindle can give you hundreds of books in the lightest of formats. It doesn't take long to get used to reading this way and digital books are cheaper than the printed versions.

A hand-held computer like an iPad means you can send and receive e-mails and access programmes like Skype to see and speak with family and friends from the comfort of your armchair.

You can also access Kindle from an iPad and the newest versions are even thinner and lighter.

There is a range of cutlery available for those who find it difficult to grip



A walk-in shower and shoe horn can be useful for those with limited mobility