

Independent Living Assistance

Dressing aids and equipment



If dressing is difficult due to surgery / injury or medical conditions, it may be worth trying different dressing techniques, making adaptations to clothing or using assistive technology aids and equipment to help dress and undress independently

General safety

- It is recommended you sit to dress - you are less likely to lose your balance.
- Store items so they are easy to reach - avoid storing items on the floor.
- Avoid leaving clothing on the floor once removed.
- Organise your wardrobe to be able to access clothing easily.
- If using a mobility aid, use it to help gather and move clothes to the bathroom.
- Practice makes perfect - Allow additional time to dress / undress.
- Conserve energy by pulling up underwear and trousers together when standing.
- Ensure you are completely dry after showering when trying to dress.

Dressing techniques

Learning alternative dressing techniques may help with independence. Occupational therapists are able to assess and provide suggestions for dressing based on a person's needs and abilities.

For example, for someone who has the functional use of one hand, there are one-handed dressing methods for lacing up and tying shoe laces, putting on a bra, shirt, cardigan, sweater, jumper, socks, knee-high stockings, and knotting a tie.

There are also techniques for how to put on a shirt if hands are weak, putting on trousers when one side is paralysed, and

dressing/undressing with limited or painful shoulder movement.

Adaptive clothing

- Loose fitting clothing is easier to put on and off.
- Skirts and trousers with elastic waistbands are easier to manage than those with fasteners.
- Clothing without fasteners, like T-shirts, eliminates the need to deal with buttons or zips.
- If fasteners are necessary, hook and loop fastenings such as Velcro are often easier to manage. A pair of trousers may have the appearance of a fly at the front, but the actual method of opening might be a velcro fastening at the sides.
- To maintain the appearance of a buttoned-up shirt, buttons can be sewn on top of the sewn-up buttonholes and then Velcro used underneath to actually fasten the shirt.
- Two buttons can also be sewn together with elastic to make expanding cufflinks.
- Clothing that opens at the back may make it easier to manage when toileting.
- Some companies specialise in manufacturing adapted clothing or can modify existing items on request.

Equipment to aid dressing

Dressing sticks

A dressing stick usually features a hook at one end and sometimes a rubber thimble on the other end. It has a range of uses including pushing sleeves off shoulders and pulling up pants. Loops can be sewn onto clothing and the dressing stick used to hook into the loops and pull up and position the garment.

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Zips / ring pulls

Large rings or tape can be attached to the zip to assist grasp. A dressing stick can be used to hook into zip rings that are difficult to reach. Another option is to replace the zip with a Velcro fastening.

Pantyhose / aids

Aids are available to assist in putting on socks, stockings and pantyhose when it is difficult to bend down and reach them.

These aids are generally made of flexible plastic that are bent into a gutter shape. The sock or stocking is pulled onto the plastic and there are cotton tapes that are held while the aid with the sock is lowered to the floor. The tapes are pulled upwards and the sock slides onto the foot as the aid is pulled out of the sock.

Compression stockings

Compression stockings can be particularly difficult to apply because of the strong elasticity of the stocking, difficulty reaching down to the end of the foot and possible increased size of the foot and leg due to swelling

A variety of compression stocking aids are available to assist in putting on compression stockings, including options for both open-toe or closed-toe stockings

To remove compression stockings there is a long handled device that has an end like a small shoe horn that slides along the leg with a hook that hooks over the stocking edge and slides it down.

Other tips that may make putting on compression stockings a bit simpler include:

- wearing rubber gloves to improve grip and avoid piercing the stockings, and
- using a footstool with a non-slip mat on it to bring the foot closer to reach.

Boot jack

To assist with removing boots or shoes a boot jack might be of assistance. It features a curved

cut-out area at one end to accommodate the heel of the shoe or boot while the other foot is placed on the other end to hold it stable, while the boot is pulled off.

Long-handled shoe horn

Long handled shoe horns may assist with putting on shoes and eliminate the need to bend down.

Buttonhooks

A buttonhook can be used to do up buttons by pushing the hook through the buttonhole, looping over the button and pulling it back through the hole. Some buttonhooks are available with larger handles to assist those with weak grasp.

Bras

If a bra is very difficult to fasten at the back, consider purchasing a front opening bra.

A 'fastener free bra', involves pulling the bra on from over the head or stepping into it and pulling it up into position.

An aid called "Bra Angel" is available which aims to assist with putting on a bra one handed. It secures one side of the bra at the front while the other side of the bra is attached to it.

Shoe laces & aids

If shoelace tying is difficult, elastic shoelaces or coil (spring) laces enable the shoe to be slipped on and off without tying and untying.

Cord and barrel locks can also be used as a securing and tightening device.

Shoe buttons are made of plastic and screw through the top pair of lace holes in a lace-up shoe. A tied shoelace can then be pulled over the button to fasten.

Another easy shoe option is to consider slip on shoes or those that fasten with Velcro or zips.

There are straps featuring nylon hook and loop material designed to convert lace-up shoes into easy-on, easy-off footwear. They can be can be

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applied to lace-up shoes allowing one-handed adjustment of laces by pulling across the Velcro mechanism to tighten up the laces and shoe.

Customised shoes can be made with easier to manage fasteners and are designed to open more fully to assist with placing the foot into the shoe.

If putting on slippers is an issue, there are medical sheepskin slippers available with a wide opening tongue that fastens with Velcro. Some designs open up totally flat and then fasten around the heel and across the top of the foot with a wide Velcro strip. Some feature a rubber non-slip sole.

Further information and support

An occupational therapist can advise you about the appliances that best suit your needs.

Through **My Aged Care** it is possible for older people to access Australian Government-subsidised services including a home assessment by an occupational therapist, and equipment. To check eligibility and apply for an assessment, call 1800 200 422 or visit www.myagedcare.gov.au/.

People under the age of 65 with a permanent disability who are **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** participants and have Assistive Technology or Consumables funding approval may be eligible for daily living aids if these items are deemed necessary. The funding doesn't cover the purchase of standard garments or footwear.

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help with sourcing useful resources and locating equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776 or email information@catalystfoundation.com.au.

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