

Independent Living Assistance

Energy conservation



This information sheet is about helping you find ways to use your energy wisely. When you use your energy wisely and more efficiently to do the everyday things you have to do, it means you still have energy left to do the things that you want to do.

Some illnesses or injuries, such as lung or heart problems may cause a person to fatigue easily. Also, many people find that as they age they don't have the energy to rush around as they once could.

Listed below are some simple ideas, techniques and adaptive equipment that can be used to help you conserve your energy.

Limit the amount of work you do

Learn to look at jobs that need doing and think about whether they are worth the expenditure of energy. Think about what will happen if a particular task is not done. Can someone else help or even do the task for you? Is it possible to eliminate steps or jobs that are not necessary?

Some simple ways of minimising tasks include:

- Soaking dishes to eliminate the need to scrub them
- Allowing dishes to air dry
- Trying to choose clothes that won't need ironing. When pulling on clothes, try to eliminate steps (for example pull up underwear and pants at the same time).
- Considering meal services or pre-prepared frozen/fresh vegetables from which can be heated by a microwave
- Using a clothes dryer or airer instead of the clothes line, or using a laundry trolley that holds the basket to avoid bending down for the wet clothes.

Plan ahead and incorporate rest breaks into your day

Before you start an activity, stop and think about what you actually need to do to achieve this task. Think about the best time to conduct this activity (that is, when you have the most energy), decide whether you can break the task down into smaller, more achievable steps.

It is also important to alternate between active and quiet jobs. Know your limits and remember that you shouldn't wait until you are tired before you stop and rest.

Be prepared to perform tasks at a slower pace and where possible, try to take ten minutes rest for every hour of activity.

Some useful ideas:

- Rather than cleaning the house in one day, try cleaning one room each day.
- Prepare sections of a meal gradually if not using meals services.
- Consider cooking vegetables in a microwave or a steamer so you don't need to lift a heavy pot to strain the vegetables
- Think about what you are going to wear before you get up in the morning so you don't waste time and energy looking through cupboards
- Try getting dressed with your clothes laid out in front of you (in the order in which you are going to put them on)

Organise your environment and storage space

Think about your storage/environment and set it up in a way that eliminates clutter and has the most frequently used items within easy reach.

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Try to remember:

- It takes more energy to repeatedly bend down or reach high. Keep frequently used items between shoulder and hip level.
- Move your feet/whole body when reaching for an item.
- Heavy items should also be stored between hip and floor level.
- Light items that are not used often should be stored between shoulder and extended arm height.

Use efficient methods/correct body mechanics

When undertaking tasks and activities it is important to think about how you are going to position your body to ensure that you don't cause unnecessary stress on muscles and joints (which in turn can create unwanted fatigue).

Some ideas to consider:

- Rather than carrying a bag in your hand try carrying it on your forearm - this has a larger group of muscles that may be better suited to taking the weight.
- Use gravity to your advantage (for example sliding objects across a bench rather than lifting them).
- **It is usually easier to push objects rather than pull them, or pull objects rather than lift them.**
- To avoid lifting, consider using a mobile tray to carry items such as ironing or plates around the house.
- Use a laundry trolley to reduce the energy needed to carry wet washing.
- Having a table or bench to lean on when working can help rest the body.

Sit to work

Sitting requires less energy than standing and there are many activities around the home that can be done from a seated position.

For example:

- A lightweight, height adjustable kitchen stool can be moved around the house to assist with preparing vegetables, washing dishes, doing the ironing or folding clothes.
- Sit to apply make-up, brush teeth and do your hair— remember to keep your elbows supported where possible.
- Consider using a shower chair or stool with a hand-held shower hose. The seat not only helps you save energy but it may also reduce the risk of slipping on the wet floor. You can also sit on the seat to dry and get dressed.
- Height-adjustable, overway tables on wheels can also be positioned over a bed or chair to provide a useful surface for tasks.
- In the garden, use long-handled gardening equipment, raised garden beds or garden pots on wheels.

Adequate seating and back support at an appropriate height is important.

Consider height-adjustable chairs or chair/bed blocks, which can be placed under the legs of chairs/beds to raise them higher off the ground.

Another option is an electrically operated recliner chair with a 'stand up' function to assist you to rise up from a seated position.

A seat with armrests gives you some leverage when getting up, as well as support when sitting down.

Use the right equipment

It is often possible to reduce strain and fatigue by using adaptive equipment or utensils that are lightweight and appropriate for the task.

What works for one person may not always work for another, but some general principles and ideas include:

- Using long-handled equipment such as pick-up sticks, long handled-sponges, toe washers

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and long-handled dusters can help reduce the need to bend or reach.

- Larger, softer handles can be easier to hold. One option is to purchase some inexpensive foam tubing that can be added to knives, forks, spoons, kitchen utensils, toothbrushes, combs, pens and so forth.

Further information and support

An occupational therapist can provide information and advice on equipment and techniques that may assist in conserving energy.

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

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.

The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.

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