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Equipment: Posture and Mobility

This factsheet forms part of a series focussing on equipment and aids that may be of benefit to people with MSA. It looks at equipment and aids relating to posture and mobility. There is a vast range of equipment available so this list is not exhaustive. The factsheet has been developed with the aim of giving you an idea of what sort of equipment is available.

It is vital that you discuss with your Physiotherapist (PT) or Occupational Therapist (OT) any items you are considering buying to help with your posture and mobility. Many items need to be the right size or specially measured to be safe and effective and these health professionals are best qualified to determine this. They will also know what items might be available to you free of charge through local services.

The MSA Trust does not endorse or recommend any specific product mentioned in this factsheet. We do not receive money from any organisation mentioned.

Healthcare Professionals

Occupational Therapist

An OT should be one of the members of your multi-disciplinary team and are ideally placed to assess what equipment may be of most benefit to you. They are trained to assess and treat physical conditions to both manage disability and promote independence.

They can carry out an assessment of your needs and determine the best possible coping strategies and recommend appropriate equipment for daily living. They can also visit you in your own home to determine adaptations that can make activities easier and safer.

You can access an OT by asking one of your medical team or your GP for a referral. You can also gain access to an OT through your local council's social care services.

Physiotherapist

A PT supports people with their physical problems and movement. They see physical movement as central to the health and wellbeing of an individual. They are trained to make the most of your potential for active movement by assessing and promoting safe mobility, reducing risk of falls and providing equipment and strategies to keep you moving safely in your environment and within your abilities.

You can be referred to a Physiotherapist through your GP, although private and independent Physiotherapists also provide therapy.

Posture

Body support

MSA can lead to weakness or the inability to use certain parts of the body. Sometimes it can help to use equipment to support areas which may be causing you discomfort or inconvenience.

For example, a head master (a collar with a padded tubular design that bends to adjust for neck flexion or extension) can be used to support forward head drop. An apex collar can be used for a head that drops forward and twists to one side. However, some people may not find these very comfortable so it is worth trying them on for short periods of time.

To support weakened arm and leg joints splints can be used. These not only help with weakened joints they can also prevent contractures (permanent shortening of the muscle) and the development of distorted positions in limbs that can no longer fully function.

Inverted prism glasses assist with visual ability when unable to look up due to head drop. These glasses allow you to see a reflection of the area straight ahead, even if you are looking down due to your head position. These can be ordered from the MSA Trust so please contact us if you would like a pair of these.



Seating support, such as cushions and moulds, can also be provided for people who may lean to one side or need support to sit straight comfortably in a chair, car or bed.

Sitting and rising difficulties

Riser recliner chairs can be very helpful if you are having difficulty rising from a sitting to a standing position. They also help you change position independently without standing and can be useful if you have postural hypotension (a drop in blood pressure when changing positions) and need to stand up slowly.



A seat riser can be used if you feel that you can safely stand unassisted but have trouble doing so from a seated position.

A tilt in space chair may be useful for people with reduced trunk and head support, who may slide forward in a chair that only has a reclining backrest. It keeps a person seated comfortably and allows for them to sit upright or be reclined backwards to an almost lying position.



A perch stool can be used to reduce fatigue when standing to do tasks that you cannot do sitting down, such as ironing, washing etc.

Bed and sleeping support

Bed rails (or bed levers/ grab rails) slide under the mattress and provide a hand rail to help with turning and getting up and out of bed. They also provide an element of safety during restless nights. If you have difficulty turning over in bed a slide sheet or 'wendylet' sheet may be useful too.



A bed cradle also slides under the mattress to keep it securely in place but it is designed so that bed sheets/clothes are rested on top of it. This promotes air circulation and prevents overheating in the night.

If overheating in the night is a problem then you might consider cool gel bed pads. The following site – www.human-creations.com - has various items designed to keep cool including cool pad toppers for pillows and cooling sheets.

Sitting or lying in one position for any length of time can build up pressure which may result in a pressure sore or pressure ulcer (sometimes known as a bed sore). One way to combat this is to use a pressure relieving mattress. These come in various designs.



A simple example is a mattress topper with a rippled or bubble effect that helps spread the pressure throughout the body. More advanced options are foam or air inflated mattresses (or a combination of both).

An advanced option would be a profiling bed. This is an electronic bed with back rest elevation, mid-bed and foot position changes. Also, the whole bed platform raises and lowers for ease of access.

These beds can help to maintain independence and are good for gradual lying to sitting in the mornings for those with postural hypotension problems.



If postural hypotension is an issue then you could consider an electronic bed recliner with speed control. These allow a gentle increase from lying to sitting position, thus reducing the risk of dizziness.

Mobility

Help with walking or moving about:

If you have a Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist they should be able to offer you advice about suitable mobility aids.

Posture and Mobility

A **tripod walking stick** is a simple aid that helps improve stability and balance.



For slightly more control and increased stability a **walking frame** may be more suitable. These can be of variable height and can come with forearm support to give greater stability and less pressure through the wrist and hands.

A **rollator walker** requires less effort than a static frame and has brakes to control movement. They also often include a seat for resting. If the opportunity to rest on the seat is important to you but negotiating turning around is difficult, speak with your Physiotherapist or OT as some rollators come with a seat positioned behind you.



A U-step frame may also be recommended if you have trouble with 'freezing' episodes and you get stuck in one position, as it can use an audible cue to aim a laser beam at the ground to assist with freezing. A U step frame without the laser beam may be recommended for people who have less or no freezing but need a more stable frame, that doesn't roll away.

Turning and transfer aids are pieces of equipment that can be used to help another person stand and turn and are used to help move a person from one place to another e.g. from bed to chair.



A **hoist** is an electrical piece of equipment that can either help a person move from a seated into a standing position (standing hoist), or a larger hoist can be used to move a person that is unable to stand from one place to another. A hoist can be mobile (on wheels so that it can be moved) or fixed (attached permanently, to a frame or the ceiling), depending on what is most suitable for the person and environment.

A **wheelchair** increases freedom to get out and about when mobility is difficult.

There are many types of wheelchairs, which include manual and electric types. In the first instance, your Occupational Therapist or GP should be able to refer you to your local Wheelchair Service, who will assess and recommend the best type of wheelchair for your individual needs.

Any type of chair can be made more comfortable by the addition of lap cushions and arm supports. They also provide greater support and aid co-ordination. A good range of attachments for chairs can be found at www.alimed.com.



More information about getting wheelchairs can be found here – www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/mobility-equipment-wheelchairs-scooters.aspx. You will also find some websites at the end of this factsheet that give information and advice about **wheelchair adapted vehicles**.

Equipment Demonstrations

There are many Disabled Living Centres around the country where large items of equipment can be viewed and tried. You need to ring the centre and explain what equipment you wish to see and make an appointment for a member of staff to provide a demonstration.

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/contacts_edc.php lists demonstration centres around the UK and also lists suppliers of different types of equipment on their website.

For motorised scooters / wheelchairs, adapted vehicles and beds, many companies will visit you and demonstrate these – be careful **NOT** to pay any money up front and do not feel pressured into buying anything if the product is not right for you. It is always best to do your research and there is often a range of similar products, so don't go for the first thing if it isn't perfect.

Further information

The Disabled Living Foundation – www.dlf.org.uk - is a national charity that provides impartial advice, information and training on daily living aids.

The Disabled Living Equipment Centre – www.disabledliving.co.uk – provide a range of services to improve quality of life for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Commercial sites selling products:

Steady Disability Aids - www.disabilityaids.net

Focus on Disability - www.focusondisability.org.uk

Nottingham Rehab Supplies - www.nrs-uk.co.uk

JPG (Just Good Prices) - www.just-good-prices.co.uk

Wheelchair adapted vehicles:

www.motability.co.uk/cars-scooters-and-powerchairs/wheelchair-accessible-vehicles-overview/

www.wavcompare.com

Second hand equipment:

Disabled Living Foundation - www.dlf.org.uk

Disability Equipment Service - www.disabilityequipmentservice.co.uk/

Disabled Gear – www.DisabledGear.com

The Trust's contact details:

We have MSA Health Care Specialists that support people affected by MSA in the UK and Ireland. If you would like to find the MSA Health Care Specialist for your area, contact us on the details below or use the interactive map here – <https://www.msatrust.org.uk/support-for-you/hcps/>.

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