

(a) Beds: a vital piece of equipment; lifetime of a bed is usually up to 10 years. A 'bad' bed will inevitably lead to poor sleep and make life more difficult. The 'rule of thumb' with testing a new bed (you should spend at least 10 minutes in the shop trying it out) is if you lie on your back and slide your flat hand under the lower part of your back, between it and the bed: if it slides in easily and there is room for it, then the bed is too soft. Investing in electric blankets can help avoid a chill on getting into bed, and some can be kept on a low heat all night.

(b) Pillows: to use either in bed or on chairs/ car seats/ etc.

(c) Chairs/seats: specially designed chairs can be bought to encourage good posture; particularly important if you are sitting a lot; sofas should not be all saggy as this will worsen back problems. And never sit with your legs under you (it twists your spine) or crossed (bad for circulation); rocking chairs often provide good back support. The Backfriend is a moulded back rest and seat, which is lightweight and folds up so is easily portable to provide comfortable seating anywhere you go: from cinema to restaurant, in the car or at work.

(d) Housework aids: to help lifting things, picking up small objects etc. Long-handled dusters for getting those pictures dusted. I don't think they do a set of blinkers or rose-tinted spectacles or special carpets designed to disguise dirt swept under them, but sometimes it pays not to look too closely in my house!

(e) Dressing aids: such as long-handled shoe horns, elasticated shoelaces and various other devices.

(f) Bathing: a raised bath seat may be of help; a warm (not hot) bath can be great for relieving muscle spasm. You can now buy equipment to turn your bath into a 'spa bath' with jets that massage various parts of your body: these are not cheap, but in the long run, may be so beneficial, that it 'pays for itself' indirectly.

(g) Gardening aids: obviously, the heavier garden work (digging) is not a good idea, but maybe planting pots or having a raised bed will help avoid bending too much; some tool catalogues carry items specially designed for disabled folk.

(h) Wheelchairs: even for those who are fairly ambulant, it might allow greater mobility and chance to get out and about if you want to spend more than an hour or so out, or travel any distance (and they can be useful for stowing purchases in so you can shop till you drop, or at least, until your companions do! Most shopping centres have reasonably good wheelchair access these days.

(i) Cars: if you have Motability, as a driver, you may be able to get your car adapted to help with problems such as inability to turn round when reversing (special mirror attachments). If you are a passenger, sit in the front to minimise jarring and vibration, or if you cannot sit for long enough, recline on the back seat with hips and knees flexed and supported by pillows. You could even kneel if sitting or lying were too uncomfortable.

(j) Continence devices: a wide variety of aids to make life less embarrassing and thus facilitate social activities. Specialist continence advisors can help you with this.

(k) Corsets and collars: long-term use of these devices is not thought to be helpful: in fact, they do not support the back/neck as well as you might think and they do lead to muscle wasting and weakness through disuse so causing in fact a greater instability than led to the use of the device in the first instance. Using a lumbar support belt may be helpful if you are going to do an activity that puts more than usual strain on that area, but it should be taken off again as soon as you have finished the activity.

Dr. Hooshmand, an expert in CRPS, recommends that the use of assistive devices such as a wheelchair, walker or cane should be discontinued if possible.

Use of a cane/stick can in fact cause further spinal problems due to abnormal posture.

Use of corsets to "protect" the back should only be used short-term if possible as

they lead to loss of muscle strength in that spinal area and thence muscle wasting. It is very difficult to reverse that trend.

(l) Handbags! (or any other bag): the best way is to carry a bag on your back; if a backpack is not your style, try a shoulderbag slung diagonally across your body so that the weight is evenly distributed on both sides of the body. Always try to carry weight so that both sides are balanced.