

BEDS

Everyone should make sure their bed suits their individual needs. Gavin Jenkins offers some advice on what to look for.

About one third of everyone's time is spent lying in bed, and for a disabled person this may be far greater. It therefore cannot be stressed enough that the prospective buyer must test and inspect any product, for as long as is necessary, before coming to a decision.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- The height of the bed must suit the method by which the person will get in and out of it. For some, the optimum height is achieved when their feet just touch the floor as they sit on the edge of the bed.

For others, the bed needs to be higher so that the buttocks rest on the edge of the bed during standing. For a wheelchair user, a sideways transfer is best achieved when the mattress is at the same height as the wheelchair seat.

- If a portable hoist is used, allow sufficient clearance under the bed.

- The position of the bed within the room may affect the ease of access.

- Comfort can only be determined by the individual, and some time should be spent lying on different beds/mattresses before reaching a decision.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF BED

A person who is unable to move, and is spending long periods in bed, may find an adjustable bed more comfortable for the change of position it offers.

Others who cannot lie flat may also appreciate this type of bed. It can also save effort on the part of the carer, particularly at night.

Adjustment is usually controlled by rocker switches, push-buttons or air-switches which require only light pressure and less precision. Ensure that any controls are suitable in size and accessibility.

Controls can be tailor-made; discuss your requirements with the manufacturer.

Beds where the head and leg sections operate independently from each other are available, as are beds where the head and leg sections move together to form a chair position.

Fitted sheets and a duvet may be the most practical form of bedding to use on an adjustable bed and pillows may need to be attached to the mattress.

A mattress elevator may be a cheaper alternative to an adjustable bed and will enable a person to sit up independently.

For those who cannot get in or out of the bed, a stand-up bed is a possibility, although ample space is required within the room.

PRESSURE CARE

Many pressure-relieving mattresses are available. Some replace the existing mattress; others lie on top of it.

Seek the advice of either hospital or community based specialists, such as a district nurse or therapist.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A useful source of reference is 'Furniture' (price £9.50, post free) one in the series of fourteen books 'Equipment for disabled people' published by the Disability Information Trust.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Disability Information Trust

Mary Marlborough Centre
Nuffield Orthopaedic
Centre NHS Trust
Headington
Oxford OX3 7LD

Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road
London W9 2HU
Tel: 0171 289 6111
Produces a leaflet on
choosing bed equipment,
price £2.50