

Disability Services

Community and Home Support SA

Information Sheet

Back Injury: assistive equipment

When a person is diagnosed with a lower back injury, the usual advice is to avoid unnecessary daily tasks. If the injury extends into weeks or months, the person will feel an increasing need and desire to be independent and resume household and recreational tasks.

Tasks may be made easier and pain/discomfort reduced using some of the suggestions below.



Self-care

- ▶ Reaching can be difficult and painful. Sitting on a chair or stool to shower can help a person reach their legs and feet.
- ▶ Long-handled toe washers and sponges can make it easier to reach legs, feet and back. Other items to consider include a long-handled pumice stone for foot care, an extension razor holder suitable for an electric or disposable razor and a long-handled applicator for creams or ointments.
- ▶ A flannel strip with handles at both ends may help someone wash and dry their back by reducing twisting and reaching.
- ▶ Because back movement is limited, it can be hard to reach a piece of soap dropped in the shower or bath. A wash mitten or soap on a rope is useful in this situation.
- ▶ Cutting toenails can be difficult. Long-handled toenail scissors can assist or you may need to visit a podiatrist for regular foot care.

Dressing

- ▶ A long-handled shoehorn may help with pulling on shoes.
- ▶ Putting socks on may be easier with a sock aid. A double style for pantyhose is also available.
- ▶ A dressing stick can reduce bending and reaching with lower garments. A folding model is also available.

Cleaning

- ▶ One big weekly clean may no longer be possible, so a change in routine may be required. Consider being selective and prioritising jobs. In a large or two-storey home keep more than one set of supplies around the house to save carrying heavy objects over long distances.
- ▶ Reduce your need to reach by using a feather duster with handle extension.

- ▶ A range of long-handled brushes featuring sponge and scrub surfaces are available for cleaning baths, shower screens, toilets and mirrors.
- ▶ Buckets on castors require less lifting/carrying and come with a range of wringing systems. They can also be used as a bin that can be moved easily from place to place when tidying.
- ▶ Swivel mops reduce twisting while mopping and can be purchased with a selection of cleaning pads.
- ▶ A long-handled broom and pan can be indispensable for small spills.
- ▶ When choosing a vacuum cleaner consider the overall weight of the cleaner, and features such as self-propulsion or a swivel mounted hose attachment for improved manoeuvrability. How easy it is to change the dust bag or attach/remove the accessories? You may wish to consider a central vacuum system that has a motor built into the house and several inlet wall valves throughout the house. A number of robotic vacuum cleaners that vacuum independently are also available.

Picking up

A reacher tool (with a magnet attached) can help you pick up objects such as clothes and toys from the floor. Models range from 340mm to 900mm in length. A folding reacher can be useful when travelling or for carrying in a four-wheeled walker.

Making the bed

- ▶ Making the bed is easier if you use a fitted sheet and a quilt instead of blankets and flat sheets that need to be tucked in.
- ▶ Reduce lifting by using a lightweight quilt that is waterproof and doesn't require laundering.
- ▶ If you use blankets, look for lightweight styles that have a high warmth to weight ratio that can be machine washed and tumble-dried.

In the kitchen

- ▶ Avoid bending by using the top rack of the dishwasher only. Consider a bench top or drawer style dishwasher that can be mounted at the height that is most comfortable for you.
- ▶ Frequently used items should be stored between hip and shoulder level. A wire carousel can be installed in corner cupboards to allow easier access to items. A shelf that sits under the microwave and pulls out to provide a convenient surface for stirring and food preparation is also available.
- ▶ A trolley or tray mobile can be helpful when moving heavy items.
- ▶ A kitchen stool can be used to perch at the counter but be careful not to hurt your back by over-reaching or swivelling from a sitting position.
- ▶ A long-handled oven cleaner may help you reach the back of the oven without bending or reaching.

Laundry

- ▶ A washing machine plinth will bring a front-loading washing machine up to a convenient height. Use a reacher to remove items from inside the machine.
- ▶ A laundry trolley on wheels will help you to move clothes out to the line or around the house.
- ▶ A freestanding clothesline will reduce reaching and can be folded flat for storage. Wall mounted clotheslines can be mounted at a height to suit the user and come in a range of sizes. A wall-mounted clothesline that hangs at a 45 degree angle and eliminates reaching up is also available.
- ▶ Carrying and erecting an ironing board can be difficult. A pull-out or wall mounted ironing board is convenient if space permits. Small bench or counter top boards can be set up at a comfortable height.

Shopping

- ▶ If you can drive or have access to transport, small frequent shopping trips may be easier for you to manage than one large trip.
- ▶ Place shopping items in the top basket of the trolley so you don't have to reach down too far to retrieve them at the checkout.
- ▶ Ask a shop assistant if they can take shopping out to the car for you.
- ▶ If you have a deep car boot, it may be easier to put small amounts of shopping onto the front passenger seat. (Be aware that unsecured items may become a hazard if you are in an accident or have to stop suddenly.)
- ▶ Home delivery and internet shopping may also be available in your area.

Gardening

- ▶ Raised planter boxes and tubs will bring flowers and vegetables up to a comfortable height.
- ▶ A range of lightweight, long-handled tools with attachments are available to suit most jobs around the garden, such as:
 - long-handled trowels, hoes and forks.
 - a seedling planter, which is designed to reduce the need to bend. The point of the seedling planter digs a small hole in the soil. The seedling can then be slid down the tube of the planter. Soil can then be firmed around the seedling with the tip of the planter.
- ▶ A trolley can be used to move items about in the garden and a work surface at a suitable height for propagation and other tasks is essential. Consider a tray mobile or table that can be adjusted to a suitable height.

Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre
11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Fax: 8266 5263

Email: ilcsa@dfc.sa.gov.au

Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus routes:

From the city T500/T501 or
207/208 to Stop 28 Sudholz Road

Timetable information: 8210 1000

