

## **Lift Able Guide to Purchasing a Stairlift**

### **Introduction**

This guide is intended to give you an understanding of the things that need to be considered when you are looking to purchase a stairlift.

Choosing the correct stairlift to suit your needs and the circumstances of your home requires careful consideration. Help and advice is available from a variety of sources some of which are listed below. A good starting point is your local authority social services dept. who will either be able to advise you or give you details of someone who can help.

Lift Able Ltd manufacture the 'Cumbria' range of stairlifts and also offer stairlifts from other reputable manufacturers. We also offer service and maintenance for all our products including cost effective extended warranties.

### **Stairs Becoming A Problem?**

If you are finding the stairs increasingly difficult to climb then a stairlift is probably a much more acceptable solution than moving home or having a bedroom downstairs.

Before you do anything else you should try to get some professional advice so that you can avoid costly mistakes. Your local Social Services will usually have an Occupational Therapist who can advise you. They will have experience of dealing with reputable companies such as Lift Able Ltd who can supply the most suitable products and provide the after sales service needed to maintain your new lift in a safe and reliable condition.

### **Assess Your Home and Your Abilities**

In order to decide on the best solution you need to consider both you current abilities and how these might change in the future. You may be able to get on and off a stairlift seat easily at the moment but you need to consider if this will still be the case in a few years time. It is

far better to get the right equipment now than to have to change it in the not too distant future.

Your stairs are the next consideration. Firstly, are your stairs wide enough to allow the use of a stairlift? If the stairs are 27 inches wide or more then there is a good chance that a stairlift could be the solution for you. Secondly, are there any bends in the staircase? If the stairs are straight then a simple straight rail stairlift could be the answer. If the stairs have bends then a more sophisticated curved rail stairlift may be needed.

An alternative solution to a stairlift is a vertical 'Through Floor' lift. These days this type of lift can be quite unobtrusive and relatively straightforward to install. The 'Through Floor' lift can also carry you and your wheelchair so that you don't have the problem of transferring from your wheelchair seat to another seat and back again.

### **Choosing a Lift**

There are several types of stairlift and 'through floor' lift available. This is again where some professional advice can be invaluable. Basically, if you are able to walk on the flat and can sit and stand without too much difficulty then a stairlift may be the best option. If you have difficulty sitting down or getting up again then a 'Through Floor' vertical lift may be the better solution. Also, if you use a wheelchair then a Through Floor lift will let you get upstairs and downstairs without leaving your wheelchair.

Once you have decided which type of lift or stairlift will best suit your needs there are a variety of options available to consider. These options are designed to customise the stairlift to better suit your particular requirements. They include different types of controls, seat type, seat belts and footrest operation to mention just a few. Lift Able can advise on which options would be beneficial to you.

### **Your Stairs**

If you are considering a stairlift then the layout of your stairs will determine which type of stairlift can be fitted. There are basically two types of stairlift, a straight rail stairlift and a curved rail stairlift.

The straight rail stairlift can be fitted to most straight staircases and sometimes to stairs which have just one or two steps to the left or right at the top of the main flight. If you are able to climb one or two steps then a stairlift which gets you up/down the main flight leaving you one or two steps to walk up may be sufficient. (Don't forget to consider what your needs and/or abilities may be in a few years time). The straight rail stairlift stops at the landing level usually with the footrest level with the landing.

The curved rail stairlift is a 'made to measure' stairlift which is custom built to suit your staircase. This type can negotiate straight and curved stairs and the rail can extend onto the landing to make getting on and/or off the seat easier. These lifts are more complex and more expensive than the straight rail type but in many cases are the only practical solution for stairs with bends.

Once again, if you use a wheelchair within your home then a 'Through Floor' lift will be a better solution. It is important with this type of lift to select the location of the lift within the home very carefully so as to ensure adequate access into and out of the lift car with the wheelchair.

### **Doorway Adjacent to Stairs**

If there is a doorway adjacent to the bottom of your stairs, the stairlift rail may extend into the doorway and could be a tripping hazard or restrict the opening of the door. The solution to this problem is the 'folding track' (also known as a 'hinged rail'). This can be manually operated or (more usually) fully automatic and enables the bottom section of rail to be folded or hinged out of the way of the door.

The fully automatic version is just that. When the stairlift travels down the stairs the track folds down. When the stairlift travels up the stairs the track folds up. There are no additional buttons or controls to worry about. (Applies to Cumbria stairlift).

If the doorway is adjacent to the top of the stairs, the rail can be arranged so that there is little or no extension onto the landing. Sometimes it may be desirable to also fit a 'track guard'. This is a small guard rail intended to prevent pedestrian users from tripping over the end of the rail.

## **Folding Seat / Powered Swivel Seat**

The majority of stairlifts have a seat, footrest and armrests which can be folded up when the stairlift is not in use to allow more space on the stairs. One option which can be very useful is a 'linked seat/footrest'. This consists of a linking arrangement between the seat and the footrest so that when the seat is folded up it also folds the footrest. This can be very beneficial if you have difficulty bending over to fold up the footrest.

Another worthwhile option is the powered swivel seat. The standard stairlift will usually have a swivel seat which requires you to push gently with your feet to swivel the seat around. The alternative is a powered swivel seat which requires no effort other than to keep the control button/lever pressed until the seat rotates slowly into the correct position.

## **Stand or Perching Seats**

The Stand / Perch seat option is designed to allow you to use the stairlift in a standing or perched position (perched: standing but with the backside resting against the small half seat). You should only consider this option if bending at the hips or knees is very difficult and/or painful and if you have good balance and are not prone to dizzy spells.

Other things to take into account are the headroom over the staircase and the length of the stairs. (Bear in mind that you will be standing for up to a minute or so). Having said this, the stand/perch is sometimes the only viable solution if the above conditions apply to you.

## **Types of Controls**

The stairlift 'up/down' controls are normally of the 'constant pressure' type for safety reasons. This means that you have to keep the control button or lever pressed until the lift reaches the top or bottom of the stairs. The important thing here is to ensure that you are able to operate the control button or lever comfortably for a minute or so.

The standard controls are push button with options for lever switch, joystick or attendant controls. It's important also to consider which hand you will use to operate the controls. If you have better use in

one hand than the other, specify that you want the controls on that side of the seat.

## **Mains or Battery Operation**

There is a choice of mains power or battery power for the stairlift motor. Both have their advantages and disadvantages but it is worth considering the options before you make a decision.

The mains power stairlift is a simpler design and has been used for many years. It is a tried and tested system and because of its simplicity is perhaps more reliable in the longer term. There are no batteries to go flat so as long as the mains power is available the lift will work.

Battery powered stairlifts are a more recent design and the obvious advantage is that the lift will continue to work if the mains power goes off. They will usually give 10 to 20 return journeys on new fully charged batteries. This will reduce as the batteries age. Batteries will usually last from 2 to 4 years before they need replacing.

Unless you live in an area that experiences frequent power cuts, we would recommend considering the mains powered stairlift for its simplicity and reliability.

## **Safety Features**

You should only choose a stairlift which is designed, manufactured and installed to comply with British Standards BS5776:1996 (or later version) and is CE marked. This British Standard specifies minimum safety standards for both the equipment and the actual installation of the lift. All stairlifts should be fitted with a safety belt and you will need to consider what type is most suitable for you. The standard lap type belt will often be sufficient but other types are available.

An important point to consider is the installation of the stairlift. You will want to be sure that when the stairlift is installed it does not create problems such as trapping hazards between the moving seat and fixtures such as radiators and window reveals. This is the type of thing that an experienced stairlift company will look out for when they survey your stairs.

One final point on safety is regarding handrails. It is very often necessary to remove the handrail on the side of the stairs where the stairlift is fitted. You should be extra careful once the stairlift is fitted if you have to walk up or down the stairs. If a handrail has been removed it is safer to use the stairlift whenever possible.

## **New or Second Hand**

Stairlifts have been widely available in the UK for 25 years and more. During this time the standards of manufacture and safety standards have changed dramatically. Modern stairlifts incorporate safety features that were not available on these older models.

If funds are tight and you are considering a second hand stairlift you should take advice from a professional and only buy from a reputable company. You need to be sure that the equipment you are buying is safe and reliable and that it can be repaired and maintained properly in the coming years.

It is not usually possible to buy a second hand curved rail stairlift that will fit your staircase. Curved rail stairlifts are custom made to suit each particular staircase and therefore are not easily adapted to fit anywhere else.

## **Renting a Stairlift**

If the requirement is short term, say 6 to 9 months or less then renting is a possibility. There is usually an 'upfront' charge to cover adaptations, installation, service and removal of the stairlift then a monthly rental charge. If you need the stairlift for a year or more it would usually be more cost effective to buy.

This applies of course only to straight rail stairlifts. As curved rail stairlifts are custom made to suit each staircase it is not normally practical or cost effective to rent. For this reason the option to rent a curved rail stairlift is not available.

[Go-to: Index](#)

## **Disabled Living Centres**

A Disabled (or Independent) Living Centre (DLC) is a place where you

can get **free** and **ethical** information and advice about products which can increase disabled or older people's choices about how they live. At a DLC you can see and try out products and explore other solutions. Centres provide free information to people in person, by telephone, letter or email.

The following list gives details of all the Disabled Living Centres in the UK. You can also visit their website at <http://www.dlcc.org.uk/> and find a wealth of up to date information on related subjects:

Aylesbury , Buck's	01296 398616
Beckenham, Kent	020 8663 3345
Belfast, N. Ireland	028 9066 9501 x2708
Birmingham	0121 200 2262
Boston, Linc's	01205 367 597
Brighton, Hamp's	01273 731 208
Bristol	0117 965 3651
Caerphilly	01443 822 262
Cardiff	029 20 313 751
Castleford , W. Yorks	01977 724012
Crewe, Cheshire	01270 612343
Dewsbury	01924 325070
Doncaster	01302 769219
Dundee	01382 436860
Dunstable	01582 470900
Eastbourne	01323 514500
Edinburgh	0131 537 9190

Elgin, Morayshire	01343 551339
Exeter	01392 286239
Grangemouth	01324 504311
Halton, Cheshire	01928 563340
Hillingdon	020 8848 8260
Leeds	0113 305 5332
Leicester	270 0515
Liverpool	0116 298 2055
London	0845 130 9177
Lowestoft	01502 405454
Macclesfield	01625 661740
Manchester	0161 214 5959
Milton Keynes	01908 231344
Newcastle	0191 284 0480
Newton Aycliffe	01325 321234
Northwich	01606 79260
Nottingham	0115 942 0391
Oxford	01865 763600
Paisley	0141 847 4959
Papworth	01480 830495
Semington, Wiltshire	01380 871007
Shrewsbury	01743 444599

Southampton	02380 825288
Stamford	01780 480599
Stockport	0161 419 4476
Swindon	01793 643966
Truro	01872 254920
Walsall	01922 402520
Warrington	01925 638867
Welwyn Garden City	01707 384260
Wolverhampton	01902 553666

### **Useful Contacts**

Independent advice is available from a number of organisations including your local Social Services department. You can look them up in the 'phone book under the name of your council. Details of some other organisations who can help you with advice are given below:

Anchor Staying Put	0191 270 6069
Arthritis Care	020 7380 6500
Age Concern	020 8679 8000
Help The Aged	0808 800 6565
Marie Curie Cancer Care	020 7599 7777
Parkinson's Disease Society	020 7566 0300
SSAFA Forces Help	020 7403 8783
The Stroke Association	0845 303 3100

## **About - Lift Able Ltd**

Lift Able Ltd were established in 1990 specifically to manufacture, install and maintain all types of lifts for elderly and/or disabled users. We provide a complete service from quotation to 365 days per year call-out facility. Our customers are primarily local authorities, individuals and trade customers. We pride ourselves on providing an excellent customer service.

Based at Stockton on Tees in the North East of England, Lift Able Ltd manufacture the 'Cumbria' stairlift range and also source complimentary products from a number of other reputable manufacturers. We can supply, install and maintain a full range of stairlift and lift products to private dwellings and commercial or Public buildings all designed to facilitate access for the elderly and/or disabled.

## **Getting A Quote**

Having read this guide and obtained some advice you may have decided that a stairlift or 'through floor' vertical lift would suit your requirements and be a viable solution to your problems getting up and down the stairs. Your next step will be to get a quotation or perhaps several quotations from reputable suppliers.

Any reputable supplier will visit your home and provide a quotation for you without any obligation on your part. At Lift Able Ltd we will provide you with a written quotation and let you decide when you are ready to go ahead. You can be sure that we will only quote for equipment that is suitable for you and your home and that will give you years of dependable service.

## **Other Products**

Lift Able Ltd can supply a range of products including the following:

- Stairlifts – Straight Rail.
- Stairlifts – Curved Rail.
- Wheelchair Vertical 'Through Floor' Lifts.
- Wheelchair Vertical Step Lifts.
- Wheelchair Stairlifts.
- Overhead Track Hoists.

Lift & Recline Chairs.