

Encouraging independence

Children with hemiplegia, just like any others, vary in their desire for independence.

Those who want to dress themselves from an early age should be encouraged. It is often tempting for a carer to help, particularly when in a hurry, and this can become a habit, so it is very important to allow extra time for daily routines. It is more difficult when a child is perfectly happy to let someone else dress them, and can see no point in trying if someone else can do it better than them.

Sometimes it is worth getting help from a Physiotherapist or OT to try and motivate the child by setting small achievable goals, and to help him/her do things in the right order by breaking down the task into smaller parts. Another idea is to make a photo chart of the dressing/undressing process for the child to refer to. Many children have emotional and behavioural problems and/or problems with short term memory. A professional can get them dressing independently sooner than a parent/carer attempting it on their own. At nursery or school, well-meaning teachers and helpers and a lack of time can get in the way of independence, but you can talk this problem over with them.

General suggestions

Keep everything, particularly tops, as big as possible. When putting on tops put the affected arm in the sleeve first. Obviously the fewer fastenings to close, the better, so jumpers/sweatshirts are better than cardigans (but make sure the hole for the head is not too tight). Where possible, replace buttons with poppers or Velcro. Sometimes tops can tend to slip off the shoulder on the affected side but tightening the cuffs may help prevent them falling off completely.

As far as getting her top off, H does manage this sometimes if it's quite a loose t shirt. She struggles and wiggles and looks like an escape artist chained up inside a sack, then just as I want to jump in and help out pops H.

Regarding the taking off t-shirts, I have always taken them off my affected arm first, pulling the sleeve through my arm, then the head then the other arm or sometimes the other arm then head.

Coats, jackets, anoraks and blazers often have to have the sleeve or cuff on the affected side shortened. Toggles and poppers are easier to manage than ordinary buttons, and poppers or Velcro can be added to zipped jackets. Popper kits, which require no sewing, are available from haberdashery departments (if you can find one), or online from

www.sewessential.co.uk > Haberdashery > Eyelets and Fasteners > Fashion Snaps

www.ribbonmoon.co.uk > press fasteners

www.millcrofttextiles.co.uk > pins and snap fasteners > fashion snaps

Tops and Shirts can have Velcro or poppers sewn behind the front button stand, or can be slipped over the head if the two top buttons are undone. Cuff buttons can be attached with elastic, so that they don't need to be undone each time.

Mitts are easier than gloves. Mitts for young children are not difficult to find in high street stores, but here are a couple of more specialised products:

www.adventurebaby.co.uk/gordini-zip...itt-1267-0.html have waterproof 'zippy mitts' for children up to 4 - a zip all the way down the side makes it easier to get the hand in.

www.skateandski.co.uk/product_info.php?products_id=1327 have ski mitts with long zips for children up to 6.

For older children and adults it is best to go to skiwear suppliers. The following are worth looking at:

www.bargainboards.co.uk/C/SKI_GLOVES

www.trespass.co.uk

www.outdoorMania.co.uk

www.mountainwarehouse.com

www.skiwear4less.com (mitts for children up to 13)

www.skiwear2go.co.uk (no men's sizes)

To avoid loss, you can use the traditional elastic threaded through the arms of the child's coat/jacket, or you might like to try glove clips to attach the mitts/gloves to their respective cuff. These are available from www.outdoorkids.biz

Buying clothes

Buying clothes is easier than it used to be, now that clothing ranges are available online, and not just from specialised mail order firms and catalogues, but also high street retailers and supermarket chains, so you can avoid treks around the shops and changing rooms. Check however whether you have to pay postage on returns.

There are a number of companies selling clothes for people, including children, with disabilities. Most of these are designed mainly with wheelchair users in mind, but may be generally suitable for children with hemiplegia.

www.independentliving.co.uk/disabled-children includes range of trousers with elasticated waists/side fastenings.

www.tanniandanni.com/acatalog/childrenstracksuits again clothing mostly for wheelchair users, but great tracksuits for age 3-14 with easy pull zips, reinforced knees and elbows, wide legs and adjustable sleeves. Also bibs and easy to put on/take off swimwear.

www.adaptawear.co.uk an adult range including shirts with hidden Velcro or magnetic fastenings and trousers with hidden side zips/Velcro fastenings for both men and women. Also front opening bras with magnetic poppers, and slippers with Velcro fastening.

Clothing Solutions for Disabled People www.clothingsolutions.org.uk Tel: 01274 746 739 Email: enquiries@clothingsolutions.org.uk Bespoke clothing service, adapt and make clothing for people with disabilities. Stock beanbags which provide posture support.

The Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org.uk/shop/subsection.asp?id=93384> Tel: 0844 89 300 89 Email: customerservicecentre@redcross.org.uk has a catalogue which offers a range of clothing as well as a wide variety of aids.

Also, dry cleaners usually run an alterations service and will happily adapt clothing and fastenings for easier one-handed use.

School uniforms

These can now be found not only in traditional outfitters but budget retailers and supermarkets as well. Generally it is easier to find suitable clothes for girls – there are pinafores that can be pulled on over the head as well as pull on skirts and trousers. For boys it can be trickier, especially as they get older. Trousers should have elasticated waists, as flies are difficult to do up, as is the top clip or button. Many ranges include trousers with elasticated waists, but they also have zips and buttons and may not be designed for pulling on and off. So you may need to shop around. Here are a few suggestions.

BHS <http://www.bhs.co.uk> have school uniform trousers up to size 36ins waist, in dark & light grey, which are designed to be pulled on although they have a zip fly. BHS also stock tailored black trousers with elasticated waists in their ladies section.

M&S www.marksandspencer.com boys' school trousers with elastic-back waist, to fit from 3 yrs to 36" waist. Girls' school trousers product codes T761204, T761201, school skirts T760129, T760111, all with elasticated waist (up to 31.5" waist).

Matalan www.matalan.co.uk has grey pull on boys' trousers for ages up to 11, and several grey pinafores for girls aged up to 9.

Next www.next.co.uk for girls: Jersey Skirt (grey and black) 400768, Jersey Trousers (grey and black) 417028, Jersey Pinafore 419957.

Trutex www.trutex.com has a pull on bootleg trouser with elasticated waistband in several colours (in girls section but suitable for boys as well) as well as pull on boys shorts and skirts with elasticated waists, all in its junior range (up to age 13).

Pull-on trousers with false flies are also available from some school outfitters. If you cannot find them locally, **Kevin's** keep a stock and will happily post them to you. They also supply school trousers for boys of all ages in a variety of styles and colours, and will do custom orders:

Kevin's, Tel: 020 8578 1210 17, The Broadway, Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 9PH.

For school trousers for teenagers see also **Adaptawear** above.

Ties

Ties can be tied then cut at the centre-back and a section of elastic inserted so that they can be pulled on over the head, or the cut edges can be refastened with Velcro. If a plain tie is needed, many men's clothing/suit retailers supply clip-on ties.

Meech's Menswear www.meechs.co.uk Tel/Fax: 01305 771224 Email: jh@meechs.co.uk has a wide range of clip-on ties. They will alter existing ties or if you have a specific design (e.g. school tie) they will be happy to help.

Socks

These can be a real problem for children with hemiplegia. They are easier to pull on if the carer turns them inside out and pushes the toe back in towards the top. It also helps if they're slightly big and stretchy. Some children have had success with various aids available from catalogues (see below). Many children find thick sports socks easiest to pull on, and of course if the child wears a splint they also need to be long enough to prevent rubbing .

Since children and young people with hemiplegia often have impaired balance, rubber-studded socks can help prevent them slipping over when running around with no shoes on. These are widely available from department stores and **Boots** www.boots.com

Here are some recommendations from our members:

'Magicfit' school socks in all different sizes and colours. They are made by Pollards www.magicfit.co.uk Telephone: 0116 277 3857 / 0116 277 9789, and are available from the website or school outfitters. They are the perfect mix of lycra and cotton which makes them easy to put on and they reach up to the knee with a wide roll top to protect from rubbing.

I lay socks flat on the side and sew a coloured double stitch in each sock. This thread sits just below the knee. This helps to line up when pulling the sock over the toes and up the shin so my son can put them on independently.

M&S sell grey knee length ribbed school socks which are generous enough to pull up to the knee and turn over the top of the splint. My 11 year old says they're very comfy and stop the plastic splint from rubbing his skin. He's been wearing them for the last 5 years. (N.B. these socks are also available for girls)

My son sits on the floor, bending his knees to reach his feet and uses just one hand. He started with his 'good' foot and some very stretchy (slightly too big) socks. First of all, he learnt to place the sock over his toes, then pulled it as far as his heel. To do this, he pulls the sock on one side of his foot, and then the other, inching the sock along his foot. Then he learnt to pull it over his heel in a similar fashion and up his leg. Once he could do this with his good foot, he started with the other, which took him longer to manage. Even now, he does not always get the heel part of the sock on his heel, but unless it is uncomfortable, we do not bother turning it round.

To avoid having to wear socks in warm weather, try www.afoliner.com. Or for one parent's solution go to the HemiHelp message board at www.board.hemihelp.org.uk/index.php?showtopic=1622&hl=liner&st=15. She fixes a sock over the AFO, making holes in it to fit the straps through. So there is still a layer of sock between foot and splint.

Aids and equipment to help with dressing

There are many pieces of equipment that might be of some help to some children and young people. For example a Dressing Stick to hook on a coat/jacket to help get it over the shoulder, pullers to attach to zips, button hooks, aids for pulling on socks or tights and Velcro strips to replace buttons. You can also improvise a zip puller by threading a doubled shoelace through the zip. Dressing aids are available in many specialist mail-order catalogues, including:

Mobility Smart www.mobilitysmart.cc

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

Borders Independent Living www.bordersindependentliving.co.uk

Living Aids Online www.livingaidsonline.co.uk

See also HemiHelp information sheets on **Equipment, Shoes** and **Shoe lacing**.

HemiHelp has a range of information sheets for both families where there is a child with hemiplegia and adults with the condition, as well as a Useful Names and Addresses List to help you contact other organisations.

Hemiplegia is a neurological condition that weakens one side of the body and affects one child in a thousand. It is sometimes described as a form of cerebral palsy and the effects are similar to those of a stroke. **HemiHelp** is a membership organisation offering information and support to children and adults affected by hemiplegia and their families.

HemiHelp is happy for you to make photocopies of any part of this document.

Helpline: 0845 123 2372 (Mon-Fri 10am-1pm)

Admin: 0845 120 3713 • Fax: 0845 120 3723

Email: support@hemihelp.org.uk • Web: www.hemihelp.org.uk

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