



stairlifts & bathlifts

A guide to
purchasing
a stairlift for
your home

ACTIVE & INDEPENDENT 
mobility limited

Introduction

When people mention buying a stairlift it is often presumed that they are for the elderly. Although this is very true in the majority of cases, we should never forget people with mobility problems of all ages. A DTI survey identified that one person over the age of 65 is killed every five hours as result of accidental falls in the home, with 57,000 of these experiencing falls on the stairs. Physical factors contribute to the risk of falls on the stairs, including poor balance, weakness in the legs, poor breathing and general 'old' age. Many people recognise that they are unsafe on the stairs, and find it too hard to ascend or descend them, and often consider moving to a bungalow or decide to bring their bed downstairs. However, moving home is a much more expensive option than buying a stairlift and sleeping downstairs (if you have the room) is totally impractical, especially if you have no downstairs toilet or washing facilities. Whatever the problems that people have getting up and down the stairs, a stairlift can make people lives with mobility problems much easier and give them back the independence and quality of life they often want.

Purchasing a stairlift should not be a stressful task, but you must make sure that the company who you buy from should be ethical, caring and provide a product that is right for you.

Types of stairlifts

As you are probably aware, there are two main types of stairlift, the first is the straight stairlift and the second one is the curved stairlift. The design of your staircase will dictate which stairlift you need to purchase. If you are fortunate to have a straight staircase in your home, then you obviously will need a straight stairlift. This option is the cheapest and the quickest to install. If you have a stairlift that has a curve or a bend at the bottom, the top or in the middle, then a curved stairlift will be required. These are more expensive than the straight stairlift, as they have to be designed and custom built to fit your staircase. However in some instances, it may well be cheaper and practical to install two straight stairlifts instead of a curved stairlift. This very much depends on the design of the staircase, but more importantly the needs of the user of the stairlift.

There is a third form of lift that may be considered and that is a vertical or through the floor lift. This type of lift can maximise the independence of an individual by enabling him/her to move from one floor to another within the home. They are extremely useful to wheelchair users as they make it unnecessary for them to transfer out of their chair and onto, for example, a stairlift.

However, vertical lifts need more space than a stairlift and it is sometimes necessary to make structural alterations to the property.

It is essential that all stairlifts and through the floor lifts are installed and that regular maintenance is carried out by a qualified lift engineer.

Who to buy from

There are many companies offering stairlifts, but you should always consider a company that specialises in stairlifts and not a company that is a 'Jack of all trades' or the 'man round the corner' who works from the back of his garage. Local companies are often used but

most of these are not specialists so caution should be used. In every circumstance, the company should be able to give you a firm price once they have surveyed your staircase at the time of the appointment at your home. It is very difficult to give a firm price over the telephone, as a representative of the company should always survey your staircase before making any recommendations and confirming the exact price.

There are many stairlift companies who use self-employed sales reps, who are only paid on results, and therefore can often put pressure on the customer to buy on the day. Unfortunately high pressured sales tactics are used by some companies, so we recommend that you have your husband or wife present at the time of the appointment. If this is not possible, then maybe another relative, neighbour or friend could be with you. **BEWARE OF PUSHY SALESMEN.**

Always make sure that if the company you are buying from is either the manufacturer or an authorised seller of the product. The manufacturer is often more expensive than an authorised seller, so it doesn't always pay for buying direct from the manufacturer. Any authorised seller should either offer you their own warranty, or more importantly the manufacturers warranty. **DO NOT BUY** a stairlift without any warranty, especially second hand stairlifts.

Second hand stairlifts

Second hand stairlifts are also known as re-conditioned, refurbished, or previously owned, but under no circumstances can they be classed as new. They are cheaper than new ones, and can often save you hundreds of pounds. However, you have to be careful when buying a second hand stairlift and the points below will give you some areas to consider:

- ***What is the make?***

You must make sure which make your are being sold, and must be shown on the quotation you receive. If the company cannot give you the make, then **DO NOT** agree to buy the stairlift.

- ***How old is the stairlift?***

The age of a second hand stairlift is very important, as most of these are no longer manufactured and have probably been installed and removed from other customers houses several times. If you do want a second hand stairlift then make sure that the product you purchase is still a current product still in manufacture. If not, then it will be difficult to get spare parts if anything should go wrong.

- ***Is the track new or second hand?***

This does depend on whether or not the stairlift is straight or curved. In almost all cases, the track of a straight stairlift will be second hand and NOT brand new. The reason for this is quite simple, the track on a straight stairlift is very easy to be moved from one set of stairs to another, and as long as the track's length is long enough, then there is no problem and is safe. However, if you have to purchase a second hand curved stairlift, then the track in our opinion MUST be brand new. Only the stairlift seat and carriage need to be second hand on a curved stairlift. The track MUST be manufactured to fit your stairs, and therefore should be built from new. If you are unsure, ask the company whether the track is new or not, and get it in writing! Second hand track for curved stairlifts can be unsafe, as more often than not, it has been re-bent to fit your stairs and probably someone else's stairs too. The re-bending of the track will weaken the metal.

Obstructions

In many homes, there are often obstructions at the bottom of the stairs. It could be a doorway, a cupboard, an open hallway. However, all modern stairlifts will have a solution to these. The track that the stairlift is attached to, will have a hinge at the bottom, which enables it to be moved out of the way, when the stairlift is not in use. These hinges can be moved manually or automatically, depending on the manufacturer. These hinges are available on both straight and curved stairlifts, but we recommend that a manual hinge is not used with a curved stairlift.



Features

In our opinion **all** stairlifts should come standard with the following options.

- Swivel Seat
- Safety Sensors
- Battery Operated in case of power failures and also give a smoother ride
- Ability to be folded away to make more room at the top or bottom of the stairs
- Easy to use controls (especially for arthritis and stroke sufferers)
- Remote Controls

Depending on the user of the stairlift there may well be optional features that are required on the stairlift, and these should be given some serious consideration. As mentioned, these optional features will depend on the user of the stairlift, and should provide a much safer environment when travelling up or down the stairs. Options such as a powered swivel seat, an automatic footrest or adjustable seat height have all to be taken into consideration, and should be explained fully by the company representative.

Aftercare service

All new stairlifts should come with a 12 month warranty, regardless of whether it is the manufacturers warranty or not. Make sure that they have a 365 day 24 hour service, just in case something does go wrong at some unearthly hour, or even Christmas Day. Whoever you purchase your stairlift from should have the option to offer additional warranty after the initial 12 months period has ended. This is down to personal choice, but we would recommend that the stairlift is serviced every 12 months as a minimum. It is not necessary to buy the additional warranty at the same time as you purchase the stairlift, but you may get a discount if you do, so ask the question.

Price

The price like anything does depend on the product you buy and at the end of the day, what you as the customer prefers. Some stairlifts are more expensive than others, and you will find that some companies sell exactly the same product at a much lower price, so it may pay to get a couple of quotations. As previously mentioned, it is not always the cheapest to buy direct from the manufacturer, but there are other obvious advantages, to buying from them.

Curved stairlifts are always more expensive as straight stairlifts, as they have to be tailored made to fit your stairs. Stairlift companies find it very difficult to give exact prices for stairlifts over the telephone, as a trained surveyor does need to measure your stairs correctly and assess the needs of the customer in order to give you a firm and fixed quotation.

Installation

Always ask for an approximate installation date, and have that put in writing. More often than not, a standard straight stairlift should be fitted in approximately 7-10 days (a little more if you have any extra features). Curved stairlifts will take more time than straight stairlifts, due to them being custom built for your staircase. However, on average it shouldn't be more than 4 to 5 weeks, and you should be informed within 3 weeks of the order being placed of an exact date for installation.

We hope that this will give you some basic information, when buying a stairlift.

Active & Independent prides itself on giving the customer the best possible advise. Whether or not you decide to purchase a stairlift from ourselves, do not be afraid to pick up the telephone and give us a call. Even if you just want advise on any of the stairlifts that you may be considering purchasing, we will give you a good old fashioned quality service.

