



What Shall I Wear?



Restricted Growth Association

Working to benefit people with restricted growth and their families



WHAT SHALL I WEAR?

This booklet is written primarily for people with a restricted growth condition. It seeks to answer many of the questions people of short stature have when it comes to finding clothes and footwear:

- Where can I get good clothes made to measure at a reasonable price?
- Are there any styles I should avoid?
- Can I get shoes on the NHS?
- How should I dress my children?

Clothes

Our clothes mean a lot to us and short stature does not mean that the way we look is any less important. We all enjoy clothes that are attractive and comfortable to wear. Clothes express our personality and can do a lot for our self-confidence.

- 6 *My son was born with achondroplasia. One of the first questions my health visitor asked me was "Can you sew?" Being able to make and adapt clothes has solved many problems. 9*

Those who can sew will be able to make many of their own clothes, as well as being able to buy garments in high-street shops and alter them. Many people of short stature rely on friends or a professional dressmaker to do the necessary work for them.

- 6 *I find that making clothes from scratch is very satisfying – more so than buying clothes and altering them. It gives you a sense of control – you make the decisions about colour, style, and so on. 9*

- 6 *Zips and buttons are always a bind. Zips at the back are out of the question as far as I'm concerned, so if I'm having clothes made, I have zips and fasteners at the front or side. Don't rule out Velcro – it makes things much easier, especially if you have pain from arthritis or a poor grip for doing buttons. 9*

Clothes for special occasions, as well as for everyday wear, pose various problems according to the bodily dimensions and exact size of the person concerned. Many people find these need to be made by an expert dressmaker or tailor.

- 6 *With blouses and shirts, I unpick the cuff, cut off the extra length and re sew the cuff onto the new opening. It's best to take note of how it was made originally and copy that as far as possible. 9*

Men of restricted growth have particular problems with more expensive items – such as jackets, suits and trousers – which usually have to be made for them and which can get very pricy. But it is often possible to find a tailor who does not charge an exorbitant price to make a good suit or alter a jacket.

Chris models clothes made especially for him

Altering trousers

If trousers are altered to fit, they need to be

retailored as well as shortened.

Cut off the excess

length and

then use the old bottom width as a guide to taper the side seam so

that the new bottom is a more flattering width. The excess material can then be trimmed from the seam and

the seam re-

neatened before the bottom is hemmed. The bottom hem needs to be narrow to avoid puckering due to the tapering of the trouser leg.

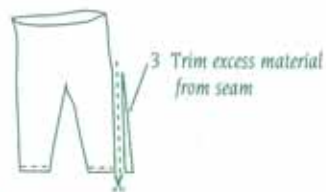
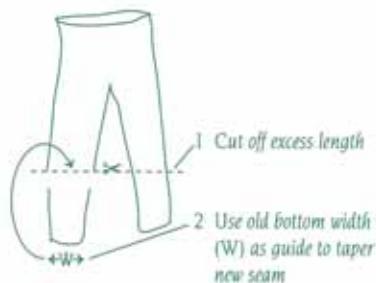


Shirts

Shirts can often be made to fit by shortening the sleeves, or simply by wearing arm bands. Short-sleeve shirts are often an acceptable alternative, especially for children, as they often find cuff buttons difficult to do up.

Tights

Tights can usually be found if the smallest styles are sought out – but even so you can end up with wrinkles round the ankles. Thicker tights can be cut down to size and then sewn up across the feet – but see the next page for a useful contact of custom-made tights.



4 Sew narrow bottom hem

- T. Jennings Ltd, Hosiery Manufacturers & Distributers, Highfields, John Street, Hinckley Leicestershire LE10 1UY, tel: 01455 618555 – They can supply specially adapted 20-denier (or thicker) tights in a range of colours, made to individual requirement (length and hip size).

Shoes

Shoes pose problems for people of restricted growth. For most it is a matter of searching through the available selection of children's shoes to find those that combine the required style, length, and width – many people of restricted growth have very wide, though short, feet. Fortunately it is much easier now than it used to be to get wider fittings in shoes.

In the United Kingdom, general practitioners or physiotherapists can recommend patients to have shoes made to measure under the National Health Service, usually by orthopaedic shoemakers. Several RGA members have benefited from this service – you may need to ask to be referred to a local hospital with a shoe clinic. Children are

allowed new shoes when required as their feet grow. Adults are allowed one pair of shoes or boots a year.

Other useful sources of information include:

- Cosyfeet, The Tanyard, Leigh Road, Street, Somerset BA16 0HR, tel: 01458 447275 – produce a catalogue, *The Blissfully Comfortable Footwear Catalogue*, which supplies extra wide, comfortable shoes.
- The RGA has a copy of *Footwear for Special Needs*, a booklet from the British Footwear Manufacturers Federation. This lists manufacturers who make made-to-measure shoes or supply sizes or fittings beyond the standard range.
- Blatchford Prosthetic & Orthopedic Services, based in Sheffield, have good-looking special shoes which may be available through local health services. Tel: 0114 276 7776.

Clothes for young children

There are various ways of tackling the problem of obtaining suitable clothes for children of restricted growth. Parents who can make

clothes themselves have an obvious advantage, while a lot can be achieved by altering bought garments.

6 *My baby daughter was born with achondroplasia, I had already bought or been given a lot of sweatshirts and turtle neck shirts, none of which would go over her head. What I did was to cut a slit not quite half way down the back. I covered the raw edges with matching tape and sewed a piece (or pieces) of Velcro at the back of the neck to reattach the opening. This was very simple to do and it worked very well.* ♣



One of the main priorities when clothing children is to make them as independent as possible, so that they don't learn to rely solely on parents to dress them.

Trousers, for example, often pose a problem for parents of young boys with short arms and stubby fingers. The problem

can be overcome if the trousers have at least a partly elasticated waist and a zip, and the boy has a device to hook onto the zip and pull it up. If your son has difficulty managing zips and buttons, you can try replacing the zipper and buttons with a Velcro strip. Stretch jeans and other trousers are also good solutions to this problem.

Getting clothes off to use a toilet presents additional problems for children of short stature. With standard-height toilets, young children have to climb up onto the seat – they can't just drop their trousers and sit on it. Trousers and pants may have to be removed completely before they climb up. (Climbing up with trousers round your ankles is both difficult and dangerous.) This may mean removing the shoes first, especially with the wide shoes many children of short stature have to wear. You can make this task easier for your child by getting Velcro-strap shoes that are easily taken on and off. Another approach is to try to find trousers with legs that are wide enough at the bottom to pull over the shoes.

Choosing styles

People who study fashion and design clothes are aware of the different effects that different styles create. For example, it is well known that vertical lines give an illusion of height, while horizontal lines accentuate width.

(That's why rugby players wear shirts with horizontal stripes – to intimidate the opposition!) Many people of short stature work to their own guidelines for choosing suitable or flattering styles. Some of the suggestions most often made are:

- Avoid large prints or big checks. Solid colours and small designs or prints work better.
- Don't try to add height or bulk – it won't work. For the best effect, go along with the scale you are.
- Avoid huge pockets or big cuffs – keep details

small, in scale with your figure.

- For people with disproportionate short stature, collars and short sleeves are more flattering than low neckline and sleeveless styles.
- Don't wear clothes that chop you in two, such as contrasting top and skirt. Keep colours monotone or related – one colour emphasizes height.
 - Look for belts that are narrow, soft and loose fitting, not wide and stiff.

- Avoid clothes that look (or are!) tight. If they are too loose, however, they can make you look bulkier. Clothes should fit well and fabrics should be soft and fluid.

Remember, though, that these are only guidelines. Styles are a matter of personal preference and you may work to completely different ones – you may be into 'intimidating the opposition'!



Sources of help

Clothing problems of all sorts can often be resolved by talking with other people of restricted growth. The RGA's Newsletters and Information Magazines regularly include relevant articles, letters from members and contact details for clothing companies, so it is always well worth scouring the pages of these for ideas. Some useful contacts are listed below.

- The Optional Shop, 19 Gosforth Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE3 1R, tel: 0191 284 4267 – Describes itself as 'the UK's number 1 made-to-measure home shopping service', with a range of fittings to suit all shapes and sizes.
- Brook Martine Co. Ltd, 94a Fox Oak Street, Cradley Heath, West Midlands B64 5DP, tel: 01384 560590 – Offers an excellent made-to-measure service, providing sample materials and clear instructions on measuring. Customers include at least one highly-satisfied RGA member.
- Caroline Trotter, Buckthorns, Upper Largo, Fife KY8 6EA, tel: 01333 360219; fax: 01333 360427

– Caroline is willing to adapt designs from her 'Hansel & Gretel' catalogue for people of restricted growth.

In recent years a number of projects and organisations have been set up that aim to address the lack of clothing provision for people of non-standard body sizes. Two of these are described below, along with details of how they might be useful for people of short stature.

Awear and specialist clothing services

Awear is an organisation of disabled people and fashion industry professionals that aims to ensure that disabled people get full and direct access to fashionable clothes of their choice. Amongst other things, Awear aims to promote cooperation between clothing designers, manufacturers and retailers, and to become a source of expertise in the design and construction of specialised clothing (including the use of new technologies).

Awear is also encouraging the growth a national network of specialist clothing services with the

skill and expertise to be able to help people to find solutions to their particular clothing problems. Most of the services have a clothing advisor who offers free advice on what to buy and where. Advice may also cover clothing design, colour and style; fabrics to suit your requirements, and information on specialist manufacturers, retailers and mail-order companies.

An affordable adaptation service (of your existing clothes or newly purchased items) is also available and provided by highly-skilled staff and volunteers, as is an affordable made-to-measure service. Several services also offer a variety of educational opportunities on a range of topics relating to clothing and personal presentation.

Currently there are just six of these specialist clothing services, but Awear's aim is to ensure that a national network is established that covers the whole of the country. The existing centres are:

- The Style Centre, Disabled Living Centre, Redbank House, 4 St Chad's Street, Cheetham, Manchester M8 8QA, tel: 0161 832 3678; fax: 0161 835 3591.
- Bassetlaw Fashion Services, Unit 7, Canalside Workshops, Leverton Road, Retford, Notts DN22 ODR, tel: 01777 860206.
- Fashion Services for Disabled People, Greenfield Centre, Green Lane, Baildon, West Yorks BD17 5JS, tel: 01274 597487.
- Clothing Matters, c/o West Wilts Independent Living Centre, St George's, Semington, Wilts BA14 6JQ, tel: 01380 871781; fax: 01380 871113.
- Suit Yourself, Avon Disabled Living Centre, The Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2QQ, tel: 0117 965 3651; fax: 0117 965 3652.
- Clothes to Suit, Mary Marlborough Centre, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust, Windmill Road, Headington, Oxford OX3 7LD, tel: 01865 227600.

To become a member of Awear or for more information, contact:
Awear, Nottingham International Clothing Centre, Knightsbridge Way, Annesley Road, Hucknall, Nottingham NG15 8AY, tel: 0115 953 0439.

She shortened the trousers herself and put in a zip.

Easytex

Recognising the importance of good clothing for people of all body shapes and sizes, a group of researchers from five EU countries has been working on a project to make specialist clothing available to disabled people at a realistic price. Called Easytex, the project is compiling a database of specialist clothing manufacturers and suppliers across the world so that disabled people can be more aware of what is available. When completed, the database will be accessible on CD-ROM and the Internet, in care centres, libraries, etc.

Another part of the project is developing an automatic body scanning system which means that people who have body measurements that differ from the manufacturers' norm can have their measurements registered and sent to any manufacturer in the world. Using modern techniques, the cost of producing special clothing should compare favourably with high-street prices.



Laura sports a top bought from a market, with trousers from a mail order catalogue.

Easytex is also studying the needs of disabled people in the area of textiles and materials. They are looking for answers to questions such as:

- What specific problems do you have with dressing?

- If you spend a lot of your time in a wheelchair, what would make you more comfortable and smarter?
- What sort of clothes would you really like to be able to buy?
- Are there any manufacturers who currently produce clothes for people of restricted growth?

For more information, or to pass on your own comments or views, contact:

Dr Jane Wyatt, Research Fellow,
Department of Textiles and
Fashion, De Montfort University,
The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH

Sharing information

Information on reliable, flexible and not-too-expensive sources of clothing and shoes is highly valuable. If you come across any firms or individuals that have supplied or adapted clothes to suit you, the Restricted Growth Association (as well as Easytex) would be delighted to hear about them. By sharing the information, we can not only benefit other people in a similar position, but also give more custom to people who have shown themselves responsive to the needs of people with restricted growth.

This booklet was written by Hugh Hillyard-Parker with the help of the many members and their families who have contributed their experiences towards this booklet. Their contributions were compiled by RGA Information Officer, Ros Smith.

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The RGA encourages members to share information and sources of help.

Other RGA publications

What is...?

The **What is...?** series looks at particular restricted growth conditions or issues. The titles in this series are:

Achondroplasia
 Hypochondroplasia
 Pseudoachondroplasia
 SED
 MED
 Diastrophic dysplasia
 Rarer syndromes

Lifestyles

The **Lifestyles** series focuses on particular aspects of living with a restricted growth condition. The other titles in this series are:

Babies and the Early Years
 Going to School
 The Teenage Years
 Careers, Employment and Education
 Having a Baby
 Adoption
 The Later Years
 Driving a Car
 Bikes, Trikes and Ride-on Toys
 Sporting Opportunities
 Limb Surgery
 Personal Hygiene



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