



# Product news

Sudden loss of sight or mobility is clearly life changing, but just getting older can also make it increasingly difficult to interact with the world around us. Design developments mean that products are increasingly packed with features, but often we simply want an easier life. We sent a range of products designed to give us just that to a user panel and their families to judge the benefits

## A system for an easier life

### CONTROL PLUGS

**A**ctive Mobility's Remote Home System allows up to 16 appliances to be switched on and off from one central remote control.

Each control plug can be used on an appliance up to 1,000W so is suitable for televisions, hi-fis and lamps. Control plugs for 3,000W appliances are also available.

Buttons on the remote are numbered one to four and each can be used to operate four control plugs by selecting a different extension on the slider switch. Operating four devices is fairly simple, but remembering the correct extension and button for 16 appliances may be more difficult.

Once the plugs are configured, the remote is easy to use. The buttons and

**Great for users who have trouble bending**

slider are fairly small but they're solid and easy to push. The remote's range is good: it can activate a lamp from the next room, so users don't need to fumble in the dark for a light switch.

It's available from [www.activemobility.co.uk](http://www.activemobility.co.uk) and costs £58.90 for a pack, including one remote control and three 1,000W control plugs. You can buy additional plugs separately.

**VERDICT The Home System is great for those users who have trouble manoeuvring or bending to reach switches. But people with dexterity difficulties may need help with the initial set-up.**



Sky: easier controls

## How to get a better grip on TV

### REMOTE CONTROLS

**S**ky has developed two versions of its Sky+ remote control to help users with impaired vision and grip.

The Bubble has pronounced grips on the back and sides to make it easier to hold while the Handstrap, pictured above, allows viewers to slide the remote on to their hands so they don't have to grasp it.

Both have larger text and better contrast between buttons and background and are marked improvements on the standard model, although the white text on light blue buttons could be improved.

The larger text and contoured buttons make it easier to distinguish between functions. Raised markings on selected functions, such as the red and help buttons, make the remote easier to navigate by touch.

The Bubble manages to meet the needs of target users without compromising its design appeal.

The Handstrap is heavier than a standard remote and is probably better suited to those who have more serious difficulties with grip. Its strap doesn't reach all the way to the top of the remote, so expect to use your other hand for functions at the top. Both available from Sky at £19.99 each.

**VERDICT Usefulness depends on your requirements. Both were welcomed for those with visual impairments, but the Bubble was the more popular choice for those with impaired grip.**

## Take the pain out of moving the cursor

### COMPUTER MOUSE

**T**he Microtrack off-table hand-held mouse is designed for those who find it painful to use a standard mouse.

It's simple to use – and the thumb-operable track-erball, which moves the cursor, is easy to reach. It's also sensitive and responsive. However, users may need to change their computer settings to enable

their cursor to move across more of the screen with one thumb movement.

It's designed to be held in the fingers, as it is too small for the palm of the hand, and lets users rest their hand on a surface rather than hovering over a standard mouse. The left-click button has a different function from that on a standard mouse, letting you scroll, though the panel found the finger hole

a little small for large fingers and knuckles. Available for £29 from Keytools, [www.keytools.co.uk/mice/micro\\_track.asp](http://www.keytools.co.uk/mice/micro_track.asp)

**VERDICT It's not best suited for typists because it is hand held. One user said it avoided the feeling of numbness found with a normal mouse, but others found it less comfortable. This one is down to personal choice.**



Microtrack mouse – some found the finger holes too small

**8,945,000**

adults in the UK are  
deaf or hard of hearing

RNID

**2m**

British people  
have sight problems

RNIB

**71%**

of those aged 70+ have  
some form of hearing loss

RNID

Messaging is available for blind and visually impaired people

# A mobile that talks the text

## MOBILE PHONE

**D**esigned specifically for blind or visually impaired users, the Owasy's 22C mobile phone is a little larger than many of the mobiles currently available. There's no screen, but an electronic voice is emitted when each button is pressed.

A familiarity with mobile phones is an advantage, as we received a mixed response from our users. They told us it takes some getting used to but it does become easier with practice.

The main benefit for impaired users is text messaging, a function that usually relies on a screen on a standard mobile. The message can be read back at any time during writing to check for errors.

Contacts can be added to the memory so the phone can say who is calling. It can also

read out sent, unsent and received messages along with the time, date and recipient or sender.

The buttons are easy to use and they click lightly so users can feel when they've pressed them. The volume buttons require more pressure so they are unlikely to be pushed accidentally.

Switching between loudspeaker and using the handset against your ear happens at the touch of a button.

Instructions are available in Braille, large print or audio. It's obtainable through RNIB on pay as you go for £351.33, or on contract.

**VERDICT** There's no denying the Owasy's takes some getting used to – and it might benefit from the voice-activated dialling available on some mobile phones. But most of our user panel liked it, with text messaging a real benefit.

**The Owasy's has no screen – but does have larger buttons and an electronic voice**



# Converting voice to the written word

## HOME PHONE

**T**he RNID Screenphone T374 is for people with hearing difficulties. It can be used as a standard phone or to make text calls via an RNID Ttypetalk operator. Our panel told us the settings and phone-book facilities were quite easy to use and that volumes could be adjusted and amplified for those with some hearing who prefer to make voice calls.

Ttypetalk acts as a middleman, converting a spoken message to text for the recipient. An incoming call will be received in this format only if the caller has used the



**Texting can be slow on the Screenphone**

18001 ttypetalk prefix before dialling. However, the only way to know whether an incoming call is a text or voice call is to answer the phone.

It has a strobe light, which flashes to indicate a call. The phone is also usable if you wear a hearing aid.

Texting is similar to a mobile phone's, so frequent text messagers will find it easier to adapt, although it's not predictive.

Available from RNID for £233.83. More information from [www.rnid.org.uk/shop/products/telephones](http://www.rnid.org.uk/shop/products/telephones)

**VERDICT** Texting is fairly slow, although a keyboard accessory is available. There are understandable delays when conversing via Ttypetalk, but it has huge benefits for someone who is profoundly deaf and wants to communicate by phone.

## Just out

### Memphis Retro 2 barbecue £183

This gas-powered barbecue from B&Q is the perfect gadget for the hot summer months. It provides music as well as cooking the food.



Music comes via a speaker in the 50s-style front panel while your MP3 player hooks into an adaptor in the back.

### Samsung oven £812

The new BT63FDST built-in oven has separate temperature zones so that two different dishes can be cooked at the same time using varying heat levels.

Samsung also claims smells do not transfer between them. Each zone has its own timer and the oven has an A energy rating.



### Forgotten your memory?

Kingston Technology and MyMemory have joined up to install a vending machineselling a range of memory cards and USB memory sticks at Gatwick's North Terminal.



They plan to have machines installed in all major UK airports and train stations later this year.

### Ricability's new guide

If you're interested in more products like those featured in this month's Product News, our sister charity Ricability will be publishing a new guide later this month.

'What's New?' will cover around 100 products designed for older and disabled people, including details of useful contacts and suppliers.

More information on 020 7427 2460 or at [www.ricability.org.uk](http://www.ricability.org.uk)