



HITTING THE HIGH STREET

Clothes are a great way to display your individuality, but shopping can sometimes be less of a retail therapy and more of a retail nightmare. Not everyone wants to do everything online or through a catalogue. **Emily Ross** explains how to make shopping a doddle

Every weekend, millions of eager shoppers swarm to city centres to spend, spend, spend. Battling against the mob and standing in endless queues can be a recipe for disaster. It's so easy to get tired and achy, and wonder if it is really worth the pain just to get that extra cute black cardie.

TIP: Try late night shopping or starting out bright and early when the shops open at the weekends. Although it might mean you have to give up on that extra hour of sleep or an episode of *Neighbours*, it will be worth the effort for a hassle-free shop. Also keep your eye out for good access in shops, including lifts – making life easier for yourself is the key (see www.disabledgo.info for a list of accessible shops in your local area).

Once you have found a crowd-free/hassle-free time slot, you can turn your mind to considering the suitability of the clothes themselves. Many tops have fastenings that are frankly impossible to operate if you have swollen and painful fingers; so small fiddly buttons or hooks are a big no no.

TIP: Try looking for zips and velcro to make life easier on yourself. Although clothes with intricate fastenings may look great on, life's too short to spend hours struggling to get them off again. Think practical.

Everyone loves a funky pair of shoes – they can finish off an outfit and make you feel great. But when your feet are swollen or painful, the last thing you want is to be wearing a towering pair of stilettos, however good they make your calves look.

TIP: Whoever said flats are dull? Thanks to Sienna

Miller, pumps are in and come in all shapes, sizes and colours – there will be a pair out there to fit your lifestyle. Best of all, they are easy to slip on and off and won't put added pressure on your joints like heels do.

Taking medications that cause weight gain or having a joint replacement that results in legs of different lengths can make shopping a frustrating and embarrassing experience.

TIP: Wearing skirts and dresses are the best way to both show off your assets and conceal the bits you're not so keen on. Many shops now do an in-store clothes altering service, which can be useful to ensure you get that perfect fit.

Now that you've selected your clothes and negotiated the fitting room queue, there's the issue of taking your clothes on and off. Bras, socks and tights can be particularly tricky, leaving you feeling irritated and wanting to give up on the whole shopping experience.

TIP: Taking a close friend shopping to help you get in and out of your clothes is always a good idea, plus they can give you a second opinion to ensure that you don't commit any serious fashion crimes. If you can't find a friend who is free, never be scared to ask for help. Shop assistants are usually more than happy to give you a helping hand, as Carly Ennis finds out on the next page...

Now that you have sorted out the more practical aspects of your shopping trip, all you have left to worry about is your credit limit. So what are you waiting for? Go shop...

Twenty-year-old **Carly Ennis**, who has had juvenile chronic arthritis since she was 11, takes to the shops for a personal shopping paradise. She reveals all to *No Limits*...



Looking good can fundamentally affect the way you feel, and retail therapy is a fantastic way of providing a huge confidence boost. This is all well and good for those who have the energy to go trawling

up and down the high street for hours on end, but it's not so attainable for us with arthritis.

Like so many people, I have pain and fatigue and, when I have a flare-up, I find the lack of disabled access a real drag. In fact, for something that is supposed to be a positive experience, shopping seems to present constant hurdles in finding clothes that are not only the right size, but also the right shape and colour too.

But there is help out there, thanks to the bright sparks at Topshop, who offer a free personal shopping service. It sounds daunting, but the aim is to make life easier for you, the customer, by listening to your needs and then pulling out all the stops to give you the VIP treatment.

After discussing exactly what I was looking for on the phone with Rebecca Clarke, the bubbly style advisor in Topshop Sheffield, I was booked in at my convenience. On arrival, I was met at the door and taken through wide aisles into the private VIP area, which was accessible by wheelchair.

Rebecca then took me through the different styles currently in vogue, from

Top and right: Carly pictured with Topshop style advisor Rebecca during her personal shopping adventure at Topshop. Not entirely convinced by the blue top; Checking out the shoes; Digging the bright pink

'punky debutant' to 'new minimal' and let me take the lead in picking out the looks I liked, whilst also throwing in the odd piece that I wouldn't usually try.

Each style advisor has training in shape and colour. Rebecca took the time to establish the sorts of clothes I personally liked, as well as asking which colours were my favourites compared with those I wouldn't be seen dead in. We then discussed the way my arthritis affected me and carefully selected clothes that were flattering, but would be easy to slip on. "Your wish is my command," Rebecca told me, with a smile.

It's important to know that the service is entirely free with no obligation. However, since I had decided to buy, Rebecca beautifully gift-wrapped my chosen clothes and opened a new till so I could jump the queue. She hugged me as I left and I felt as though we had cultivated a real rapport during the three hours together. What a way to shop.■

