

Designing enabling bathrooms for people with Multiple Sclerosis. Guidance for occupational therapists.

GUIDANCE FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS AND OTHER HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

closomat®

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, progressive, and unpredictable neurological condition that impacts over 130,000 people in the UK.



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ABSTRACT

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) affects physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional functioning, often leading to occupational disruption.

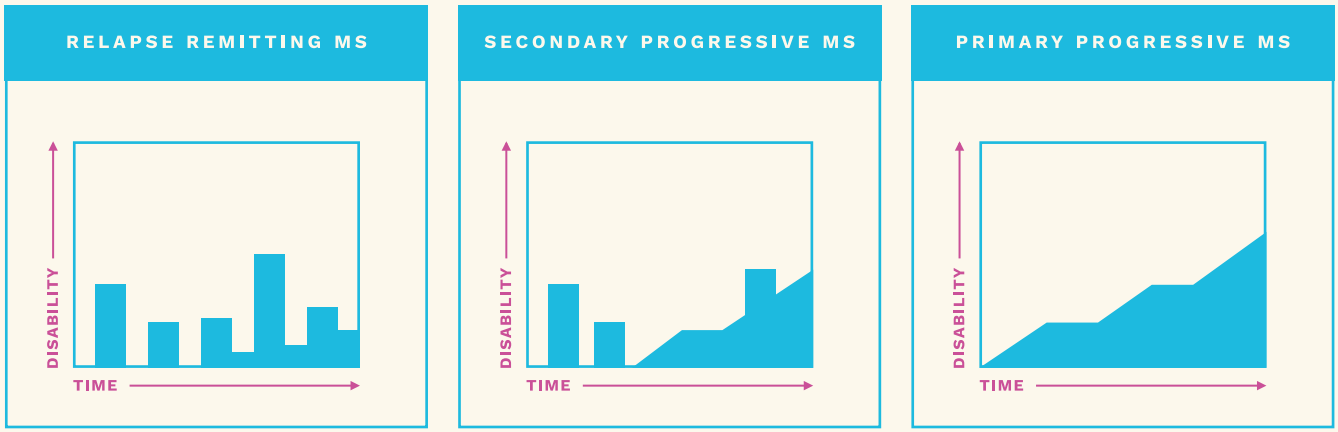
For many people with MS, the bathroom presents one of the most complex and hazardous environments due to the convergence of fatigue, temperature sensitivity, and reduced mobility or dexterity.

This white paper outlines clinical considerations and design principles to guide occupational therapists (OTs) in specifying bathroom adaptations that support independence, dignity, and safety for people with MS, drawing on lived experience, evidence-based practice, and universal design principles.

What is MS?

MS is an autoimmune condition that affects the central nervous system by attacking the protective myelin sheath around nerves. This disrupts the transmission of nerve signals, resulting in a variety of symptoms that differ greatly between individuals.

Types of MS:



The Occupational Therapy Service's Director, Adam Ferry, adds: "For individuals who are newly diagnosed, more frequently the update terminology is being used to describe the types of MS. These include terms such as:

1. **Active/not active.**
2. **Worsening/stable.**
3. **With/without progression."**



Symptoms Influencing Bathroom Design.

- Fatigue.
- Heat sensitivity.
- Muscle weakness and spasticity.
- Balance and coordination issues.
- Visual disturbances.
- Cognitive challenges (e.g. memory, attention).
- Bladder and bowel dysfunction.

Epidemiology.

- Over 130,000 people in the UK live with MS.
- Equates to 1:500.
- Approx. 7,100 new diagnosis per year.
- Average diagnosis age is 30 – 40.
- Women are 2.5 x more likely to be diagnosed.

Why Bathroom Design Matters.

Bathrooms are essential spaces for self-care and privacy. For individuals with MS, the bathroom can be a source of stress, risk, and loss of independence. Poor design exacerbates physical and cognitive impairments, while appropriate, enabling adaptations can promote autonomy, reduce carer reliance, and improve quality of life.



1. Accessibility

- Provide level access throughout the bathroom—avoid thresholds and raised shower trays.
- Ensure generous circulation space for walking aids or future wheelchair use.
- Maintain a consistent layout to preserve habitual routines and reduce cognitive load.
- Install wide, easy-to-operate doors—preferably sliding or outward opening in case of falls.

2. Energy Conservation and Fatigue Management

- Proximity of all essential fixtures (toilet, shower, basin) to reduce effort.
- Wall-mounted or seated showering options (folding, height-adjustable shower seats).
- Floor-fixed or integrated transfer supports (e.g., Closomat wash/dry toilet with arms).

3. Temperature Regulation

- Consider underfloor heating instead of radiators.
- Ensure excellent ventilation (auto-fan systems or easy-access window controls).
- Recommend thermostatically controlled showers and taps.
- Explore cooling technologies like ceiling fans or integrated air systems.

4. Safety and Falls Prevention

- Non-slip, matte flooring (avoid high gloss or patterned tiles).
- Avoid tripping hazards such as rugs or freestanding furniture.
- Provide contrast between floor, walls, and fixtures.
- Position grab rails only where required and at user-specific heights.

5. Cognitive and Sensory Support

- Task lighting.
- Motion-sensor or voice-controlled lighting to reduce decision fatigue.
- Easy-to-understand shower and toilet controls.
- Minimise visual clutter and reduce reflective surfaces that cause disorientation.

Specialist Sanitation — Closomat Wash & Dry Toilets.

Closomat toilets are a cornerstone in accessible bathroom design for people with complex conditions like MS. These integrated toilets offer:

- **Hands-free, hygienic cleansing (ideal for individuals with reduced dexterity or fatigue).**
- **User-adjustable wash/dry functions, reducing reliance on carers.**
- **Consistent, repeatable routine support—helpful for cognitive impairment.**
- **Integration with DFG-funded adaptations and custom bathroom layouts.**



Client Reflection – Matthew's Story:

Matthew Davidson, a former assistant head teacher and father of one, lived an active life filled with work, football and family. That changed when unexplained collapses and overwhelming fatigue led to a diagnosis of Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (RRMS).

The Closomat Palma Vita became a turning point in Matthew's daily life, and he describes the impact of a Wash and Dry Toilet on his daily life. Matthew adds: "I've got a Closomat toilet which is amazing. It's honestly one of the best things I've ever had."



DESIGN PRINCIPLES SUMMARY

Principle	Key Focus
Functionality	Enable performance of ADLs and reduce need for assistance
Consistency	Layout and control familiarity reduce anxiety and cognitive demand
Safety	Reduce falls and scald risks, improve stability and movement
Future-proofing	Plan for progression (mobility aids, energy changes, etc.)
Dignity	Enable private toileting, washing, and personal care

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE

- MS Society – www.mssociety.org.uk
- NICE Guidelines NG220 – www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng220
- Foundations DFG Guidance – www.foundations.uk.com
- Building Regulations – Approved Parts M & K

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS CONCLUSION

Designing accessible and adaptive bathrooms is central to supporting people with MS to remain safe, independent, and in control of their routines. By integrating expert clinical insight, the lived experience of those with MS, and solutions from trusted partners like Closomat, occupational therapists are uniquely placed to transform these spaces into supportive, dignified environments.



We're specialists in helping people with specific toileting needs.

We invented the Wash and Dry toilet over 60 years ago, and tens of thousands of people use our products every day to help them live their best lives. So we can say, with confidence, that we understand the needs of users better than any other manufacturer and we use this unrivalled knowledge to determine what is important (and what is not!).

We help OTs build specifications every day, and we can be there for you whether you need us on site with you to help determine the best possible solution for your client, or we can do this remotely, should access not be possible for clinical reasons.



Our products have been designed in consultation with healthcare professionals and have a range of clinical, health and well-being benefits.

We know that everyone is different, even if they have the same disability or condition. That's why we ensure our products are customisable in thousands of ways. This may seem complicated; but it isn't. It simply means that we can support you whatever your client's requirements are at the time of specification or into the future.



We're the only specialist UK-based manufacturer of Wash and Dry Toilets.

We have our own service team and our own engineers, meaning that we can ensure a consistent and expert back up service for our products, for you, and for your clients.

We understand that our products provide a much-valued level of independence, which is relied on every day. As such our in-house service team are on hand to maintain, repair and adapt your toilet for as long as your client needs it.



DESIGNED AND BUILT IN BRITAIN

We hope that you have found this white paper informative and that it has given you a good overview of what needs to be considered when you are building a specification for your clients with toileting needs.

This white paper is part of a series available at: closomat.co.uk.

In these white papers we've covered what you should keep in mind, with particular importance being given to the needs of the user.

If you require any further support, such as more detailed technical data, or help with specifications then please get in touch (details on the back page).


Understanding and specifying Wash and Dry Toilets. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Cerebral Palsy and accessibility. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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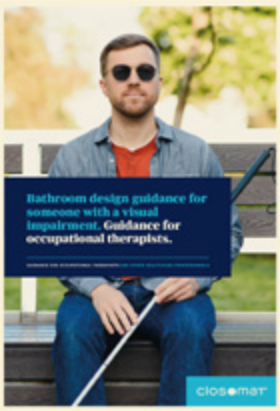

Considerations in the provision of toilet aids for children with disabilities. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Considerations in bariatric toileting provision. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Design guidance and considerations for a domestic accessible toilet. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Specification for moving and handling in a toilet environment. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Age-Related Decline: Is it Real and Does it Impact Toileting? Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Bathroom design guidance for someone with a visual impairment. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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Functional Implications of Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) and Risk Management. Guidance for occupational therapists.
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