

Aging in Place Using Assistive Technology

Judie Lee, IPAT Director

Assistive technology (AT) provides a different way of doing things for individuals experiencing the effects of aging. It allows the elderly to remain safely and independently in their homes and to stay active in recreation and leisure activities. Many AT solutions are available as built-in features on products that are readily available in local stores while others need to be purchased from specialty stores or through specialty catalogs.

How does one find out about the technology they need? The first step is to identify what one wants to be able to do and then specify what is preventing one from doing it. The second step is to recognize that some type of adaptation or gadget may be necessary to accomplish the task. The third step is to start seeking information and asking questions about how to do the task differently. To follow are some ideas meant to spur assistive technology questions.

A variety of assistive devices can help in *daily living*. Door bells and alarms can be purchased that emit a flashing light. Standard phones come with a wide range of features such as volume control and large number buttons. All television sets made after 1993 have captioning capabilities. There are a wide array of magnifiers, voice narrated videos and modified clocks. In the kitchen, levers can replace hard to turn stove, sink and door knobs. There are an array of jar, bottle and box openers available. Specially designed eating utensils and cutting boards assist those with limited hand use or strength. Enlarged print timers and cook books assist those with vision problems.

Home safety is a concern for all and many AT devices are designed to prevent falls, fires, break-ins and control household appliances. Long handled reachers are available to clean hard to get at areas. Grab bars come in a variety of shapes and sizes and can be placed in many spots where extra support is needed. Alerting devices can be attached to a sink or cooking pot to let you know when the liquid has reached a certain level to avoid overflowing. Recreation and leisure activities are an important aspect of everyone's life. There is modified exercise equipment for individuals in wheelchairs, enlarged print playing cards and card-holders, special gardening tools and modified hunting and fishing gear.

If this article has spurred you to ask new questions, call the AT Info-Line to begin your search for assistive technology answers I 888-214-2780 or

go to the IPAT website at <http://www.ndipat.org> or link directly to the booklet [Doodads, Gadgets & Thingamagigs](#).

Upcoming Workshop - Focus Elderly

The Using Technology to Promote Independence for Older Adults workshop will introduce participants to the wide range of assistive devices and services available to accommodate the elderly across environments and tasks. Device categories will include: aids for communication, aids for daily living, environmental control systems, home site modifications, sensory and mobility aids. Participants will examine the range of devices and receive information on how to implement device use and access assistive technology services to assist older adults in maintaining safe and independent lifestyles.

The workshop is geared toward an audience of senior citizens, service providers, family members and volunteers working with older adults. It is a **FREE** workshop sponsored by the Interagency Program for Assistive Technology (IPAT) and will be held on October 7, 1998, at the Kelly Inn in Bismarck from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Workshop presenters are from the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Aging/Center for Assistive Technology in Buffalo, New York.

As a recipient of the AT KEY newsletter, you will receive conference registration information at a later date. If you wish more information or choose to pre-register now by phone, call the North Dakota AT Info-Line at 1-888-214-2780.

Take Note

Tetra offers customized AT assistance: A network of 470 volunteers throughout Canada and the US completed over 1200 projects last year by matching people who need specific AT devices with volunteer professionals who can fabricate or customize devices to meet unique need.

The organization is founded and run entirely by people with significant disabilities. Tetra's Technical Assistance Program does not compete with commercially available products, nor will it service projects when there is funding available to hire rehab engineers, occupational therapists or other health professionals.

For information contact: Tetra Society of North America, Plaza of Nations, 770 Pacific Boulevard South - Suite 27, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6B 5E7 or call (604) 688-6464 ext., 108, e-mail tetra@reachdisability.org or www.reachdisability.org/tetra

Consumer Connection

The Talking Book Marker

Jim Daily - Butte MT

For years now, I have enjoyed being a member of The Talking Book Club. I have listened to numerous books, mostly while relaxing in the evening. Night after night, not out of boredom, but out of sheer tiredness, I would fall asleep while listening to the cassette player. It soon became an annoyance to me because the following night I would spend an enormous amount of time trying to find the place on the tape where I fell asleep the previous evening. Rewind, stop, play for a few seconds. Rewind, stop, play for a few seconds. (Does this sound familiar?) Finally enough of that went on and I thought if people can place a bookmark in a book when they are finished reading for the evening, why couldn't I have a bookmark when I was finished listening for the evening? Thus, the inspiration for and creation of 'The Talking Book Marker'.

The 'Talking Book Marker' is a simple switch that plugs right into your cassette player. While you are listening to the tape, the switch must be held down. As soon as you relax your grip, the switch lets up and the talking book stops playing. This simple solution has been wonderful. No more rewind, stop, play for a few seconds for me. I simply turn on my cassette player, hold on to my 'Talking Book Marker' switch and enjoy listening from where I left off the night before.

If you are interested in more information or in placing an order, please call me, Jim Daily, at (406) 782-2202.

Improve Home Accessibility: Doorknobs, Doors and Doorways

It is often the simple modifications and devices that people have made or purchased that really increase the freedom and independence of individuals with disabilities at home. Many modifications have little or no cost and most of the devices can be purchased for under \$100.

Grasping and turning doorknobs can be difficult for many. To make this task easier, wind several rubber bands around the largest part of the doorknob. When this modification no longer works, cover the existing doorknobs with doorknob extensions (\$6) which go right over the regular doorknob making installation a snap. These extension devices create a lever handle which makes the door easier to open. If doorknobs need replacing, replace them with lever handle doorknobs (\$20 and up). Home improvement, hardware and building supply stores have many lever styles to choose from.

If you have doors that are hard to open because they rub on the floor or carpet, you can adjust them without removing them. Just put a large piece of sandpaper on the floor under the door and move the door back and forth a few times. This will smooth the bottom of the door making it easier for everyone to open.

For someone needing a wheelchair, a cost effective way to widen doorways up to one or two inches is to install offset door hinges (\$25). The hinges allow the door to swing out and away from the door opening. They are easy to install using the existing holes and screws and they require no cutting or drilling. You can find the hinges at many hardware or building supply stores.

Portable and roll-up threshold ramps will accommodate minor surface changes inside your home. Simply place the threshold ramp over a standard or sliding door entrance. Ramps are made of various substances and will cost anywhere from \$70 and up depending on size and construction.

If you can't find the products you need at a local home improvement, building supply or hardware store, call the AT Info-Line 1-888-214-2780 and ask them to send you a listing of mail order companies specializing in home modifications and aids.

Funding News

Private Insurance Coverage of Assistive Technology

The key to insurance coverage for assistive technology devices and services lies in the policy's list of covered services and exclusions. When the policy states that speech language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, durable medical equipment, and/or prosthetic devices are covered, the insurance policy's responsibility and the subsequent claims process are usually straightforward. Unless the policy specifically **excludes** the needed assistive technology, the insurer should be requested to provide funding through a claims submission.

The specific requirements of the claims process defined within the policy must be followed. Generally, a physician must prescribe the device and a speech, occupational, or physical therapist must prepare a justification. The justification must describe: the claimant's physical impairments and functional limitations without the requested device; the claimant's compromised safety and/or medical needs; and the impact the device will have on improving functional abilities, self care, independence, and safety/medical needs.

If the device for which the claim is being filed is within a gray area of coverage, it may be necessary to attach a cover letter to the claims form with a more complete explanation of the justification. If a complete and comprehensive claims file is submitted, a decision should be provided within about 30 days. In the event of a denial, all hearings and appeals avenues within the insurance company should be pursued. If these efforts are unsuccessful, the claim can be appealed through the North Dakota Insurance Commissioner's office.

For information about a specific policy, contact the insurance company sales representative.

Equipment Spotlight

GO-BOT

The *GO-BOT* is an exploratory mobility device which allows children with physical disabilities the opportunity to be upright and mobile. It is designed to be used by children from 12 months of age up to 100 pounds in weight. The battery operated *GO-BOT* maneuvers easily both indoors and outdoors helping young children experience self-directed movement while developing the skills needed for transition to other mobility devices. The adjustability of the sitting or standing platforms permits a variety of positioning opportunities for inclusion in family~ntered and peer activities. It can be operated via switches, proportional joystick, or can be controlled by an optional radio remote control with an emergency on/off switch.



The *GO-BOT* has been purchased by the IPAT project and is available for free trial use. To organize a loan, contact Don Olson, Adaptive Equipment Services at the Developmental Center in Grafton - 1 -800-252-4911 ext. #4583. It is available for purchase through Innovative Products, Inc., Grand Forks, ND - 1-800-950-5185, prices available at www.iphope.com

Mark Your Calendar!

3rd Annual Early Intervention Institute

- September 10-12, 1998
Seven Seas - Mandan, ND
Dawn Botsford
800-342-8230

Guardianship Assoc. 1998 Conference

- September 17 & 18,1998
Kelly Inn - Bismarck, ND
Michael Cook
800-252-4911 ext. 4404

Using Technology to Promote Independence for Older Adults

- October 7, 1998
Kelly Inn - Bismarck, ND
Karen Pearson
888-214-2780

State House Conference On Aging

- October8&9, 1998
State Capitol - Bismarck, ND
Karen Pearson
888-214-2780

Closing the Gap

- October20-24, 1998
Radisson - Bloomington, MN
Jan Latzke
(507) 248-3294