

MAINTAIN YOUR LIFESTYLE...DIFFERENTLY

As we grow older, we experience gradual changes in hearing, memory, vision, and mobility. Many times, these changes create the need to do everyday things a little differently. For instance, some people walk with the aid of a cane, others hear the Sunday sermon through an assistive listening device, or read the newspaper with a lighted magnifier.

If you are experiencing any of these age related changes, you may be able to use assistive technology (AT) devices and services to maintain your independence. Assistive technology devices are tools that allow you to do familiar tasks differently. Assistive technology services help you select, acquire or learn to use assistive technology devices. Whatever your need, chances are there are AT devices and services available which will allow you to continue to do what you want to do.

How do you know if you have an assistive technology need? Simple. If an everyday activity like operating the TV remote, getting in and out of a bathtub, car or bed, talking on the telephone or remembering to take medications has become difficult or impossible, you have an assistive technology need.

Hearing Loss. There are a number of devices available for people who are hard of hearing, including: vibrating personal pager systems, vibrating alarm clocks, telephone amplifiers, telephones with ringers that flash, telecommunication devices for the deaf, personal listening devices, FM and infrared systems that transmit and amplify sound, and hearing aids. Vibrating signal and alert systems can notify individuals who are deaf when a baby is crying, or when a fire alarm, telephone or doorbell is ringing. All new 13-inch or larger TVs have built-in decoders for closed caption (CC) viewing. Environmental modifications also make a difference; carpeting floors and placing curtains on all windows reduces noise and echoes.

Home Modifications. Modifying your home facilitates ease, independence and safety. Arrange your home to maximize mobility by clearing pathways and walkways of objects or small rugs that may be tripped over. Make sure living areas are well-lit by increasing light bulb wattage and installing night lights. Doorways need to be wide enough to negotiate and easy to open. A doorway may be widened a couple of inches with a swing-away door hinge or made more obvious with color contrasting trim. Inexpensive adaptations to doorknobs ease access and include: ribbed or soft handle door grips, doorknob twisters, doorknob extensions, and lever or door loop turners. Reaching aids are helpful in most locations, and items used frequently should be kept within easy reach.

Vision Aids. There are many simple devices that can help people with low vision: pens that write in bold-lines, preprinted bold lined paper and

magnifiers. Banks can print checks and deposit slips in large-print, and writing guides are available that fit over a check blank or sheet of paper to indicate where to write. Large-print reading materials can be purchased in bookstores or borrowed from public libraries. Telephones with large-print buttons or dials, self-threading needles and large-print versions of popular games are available. There are clocks and watches, thermometers, and blood sugar monitors with large-print or voice output. As well, there are a wide range of microprocessor-based products offering a variety of useful features for those with vision loss: character enlargement systems, Braille output devices, voice output systems, scanning systems and audio tactile devices.

Mobility and Daily Living Aids. There are many devices that can help you move, reach, carry, stand, lift or manipulate objects in the environment. A wide variety of canes, crutches, walkers, scooters and wheelchairs are readily available. If getting from one position to another is difficult, there are rotating disks, manual slings, sling seats, stands, belts, boards and lifts. As well, bed rails, overhead trapeze bars, and grab bars provide stability and support in many environments.

Spoons, toothbrushes, razors and hairbrushes can be modified for better grip by adding foam curlers or pipe insulation to the handles. Single-lever faucets, hand-held showers and detachable shower heads make cleanup doable. Look for weighted cups, large-handled and double-handled cups, cups with lids and cups with nose cutouts to make drinking easier. To remain safe and active in the kitchen use: push/pull oven sticks, one-handed peelers, can openers, and cutting boards, cutting boards with suction cups, rocker knives, box, jar, bag and can openers, place lazy susans in the refrigerator and cupboards, and substitute loop handles for knobs. Place a mirror over the stove so a seated person can see if pots are boiling.

Button hooks, cuff and collar button extenders, dressing sticks, and trouser pulls can be effective dressing aids. Long shoehorns, bootjacks, stocking aids and elastic shoelaces make putting on footwear easier. Modify clothing using Velcro. Purchase or make a zipper pull by attaching a key chain ring, or paper clip to a zipper.

Recreation and Leisure. There are a variety of devices available to keep you active in sports and recreation activities. Assistive technology can include: adapted exercise bikes, push-button fishing reels, alternative golf clubs, automatic page-turners and a variety of gun mounts. For card players there are hand-held electronic card games, automatic shufflers, large print playing cards and card holders. Gardeners may enjoy adapted gardening tools, raised garden beds, stools or outdoor faucet knob adapters. There are large-print crossword puzzles, embroidery patterns and sheet music. As well, knitting aids, needle threaders, embroidery hoops and crochet aids keep hand-crafters stitching.

Next Steps: Using assistive technology can make everyday tasks possible and easier for you. AT devices and services are as varied in design and purpose as the interests and activities of the person requesting them.

So, how does one begin? An easy first step is to call North Dakota's toll-free AT Info-Line at **1-800-214-2760**. The AT Info-Line staff will gladly answer your questions or put you in touch with vendors and/or service providers specific to your needs.

This document was developed by the Interagency Program of Technology (IPAT), whose charge is to support North Dakota residents who need assistive technology devices and/or services. For more information call toll-free: 1-800-265-IPAT (-4728). Alternative formats available.

IPAT, a program of the North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Human Services, is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Department of Education, U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).