

Dear Katherine,

Since my husband Richard's heart surgery last spring, our children have been worried about "what to do with us" out on the farm. We're happy here and have no intention of moving. We can't do all the things we used to do, but I think we've convinced our kids we can get along just fine. We went to the Senior Center for dinner several months ago and saw a program about special tools designed to help make life easier for people. Ever since then, I have been noticing all kinds of things our friends use to make life easier. Maybe some of them would benefit you and help ease the minds of your own kids!

I've been trying new low-fat, low-cholesterol recipes to keep Dad on the diet the nutritionist at the hospital suggested. I have a new large-print cookbook and a magnifying glass with a light to read recipes I've cut out of the newspaper. There are so many new things to try! I've always loved to make soup, but I've sort of stopped making it in the last few years. I was afraid to try to carry the stockpot from the sink to the stove - and it was just too much trouble to fill the pot with small pans of water. One of the gadgets I saw at the program is called a roll-about. It looks like a ping-pong paddle with wheels. I put the empty pot on it, roll it over to the sink and fill it with water using the sprayer, roll it across the counter to the stove, and ease it onto the burner. Of course we use the ladle to fill bowls and freezer containers when the soup is ready! We also have a new jumbo-digit timer. I couldn't find it the last time I was making bars for Circle. Richard had it - he was using it to time his walks on the treadmill!

Boxes have been another challenge. I used to think nothing of opening three cereal boxes every morning since each of our kids had a different favorite. With my arthritis, even one was a chore. Now I have a little plastic doodad that makes opening boxes, even for the first time, easy as pie.

Richard and I had a good laugh about one of the tools the young man showed us. It was shaped like a long-handled hook. He showed us how to use it to button buttons and pull up zippers, making it especially easy for people who have the use of only one arm. He acted like it was some new invention, but I think all of us remember our mothers using button hooks on their shoes when we were little. I had just never thought about using them on jackets and skirts and trousers!

Richard came back from coffee at the café the other day. He'd been in to town to see his sister, Margaret. She has just moved into those new assisted living apartments they were building last summer. She has a new walker that has skis on the front legs and wheels on the back so it can go easily from tile to carpet. It also has a basket for carrying her knitting, a tray and cup holder so she's never without her coffee, and it even has a fold-out seat in case she needs to stop and rest on her way to the dining room. The woman in the apartment next door has arthritis so badly she uses a three-wheeled battery-operated cart to get around. She said her son found a used one for her from the AT Swap & Shop, so it cost

much less than it would have new. This can be found on-line at [www.ndipat.org/swap/swaptoc-03.html](http://www.ndipat.org/swap/swaptoc-03.html) or by calling 1-800-265-IPAT (4728)

One of Margaret's greatest problems is that she forgets to take her medication. We saw a special pillbox with an alarm so we got her one. Her healthcare worker fills it each time she visits and Margaret just carries it with her in her walker. She's been feeling much better since she's been taking her medicine on a regular schedule.

Richard said he also ran into Vern at the café. Vern had a stroke around Christmastime last year, but seems to be coming right along. He has lost a lot of weight and was pretty unsteady on his feet - bending over was a real problem for him. His wife, Edna, got him a "reacher." He uses it to pick things up off the floor or get his hat off the shelf in the closet. He calls it his "cherry picker." He even uses it to give their dog, Max, a good scratch behind the ears now and then.

Edna told me that the thing he missed the most was taking Max for a walk. Max was so strong he would pull Vern off balance. Their vet showed them a special collar that fits over Max's nose and behind his ears so Vern controls his head instead of being pulled along. Edna can put the collar on Max and push Vern out the door with Max in one hand and his cane in the other. She can get some things done around the house while Vern and Max get a little exercise. Of course, they had to practice in the beginning, but she doesn't worry now.

Even getting around in the bathroom at their house has become easier. Their son Kevin installed two hand grips on the tile in the shower, and put in one of those hand rails that fits on the side of the tub. He also installed arm rests that fit on either side of the toilet and the special seat that makes the toilet higher so it's easier to sit down and stand up. Of course we all tried them out when we were there for quilting last week. They may be necessary for Vern, but we all agreed they made things much easier for us!

The best part about all these doodads and gadgets is that there are catalogs and vendors and even IPAT right here in North Dakota that can help us figure out what we need and how to get it.

Fondly,

Kay