

Fashion an Easier Lifestyle with Assistive Technology

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What is assistive technology?

Sometimes everyday tasks can become difficult or impossible. If you break an arm, have a stroke, or live with arthritis, diabetes or other chronic conditions, brushing your teeth, cooking dinner, or even tying your shoes can be a challenge. With age, changes in vision, hearing, and mobility can mean that everyday activities may become more problematic.

Assistive technology (AT) refers to a variety of devices and strategies that can be applied in all aspects of life. The term assistive technology can be intimidating, but by substituting the words *helping* and *tools*, the idea becomes much clearer. The concept of assistive technology is to make life easier. Sometimes assistive technology may be a preventative technique. For example, if you have arthritis, using an electric can opener rather than a handheld one might help to prevent joint pain and/or stress. Often, assistive technology is used by people with disabilities, whether in the short or long term.

Assistive technology includes everyday tools that can be found in stores in your local community. Examples include toothpaste-tube squeezing devices, a long-handled bath sponge, and clothing with Velcro fasteners or slip-on shoes. Assistive technology also includes specialized and customized equipment. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of assistive technology devices and strategies.

This fact sheet focuses on assistive technology devices you can use to accomplish everyday tasks, such as attending to personal care, preparing meals, completing basic household chores, and engaging in recreational activity. Assistive technology is designed to make life easier for everyone.

Who uses assistive technology devices?

Assistive technology can benefit almost anyone. Most people have met that stubborn pickle jar with the lid that refuses to budge. A rubber jar opener comes in handy in that situation.

If you have a temporary injury or are recovering from surgery, you might consider using assistive technology until you fully recover and are able to resume regular activities. If you have a chronic condition such as arthritis or have a disability, then assistive technology may help you with your daily activities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 18 percent of Americans reported a disability and 12 percent reported a severe disability in 2002. Nearly 20 percent of Kansas residents had a disability that limited their activity in 2005. Assistive technology has the potential to help many people. Perhaps it can help you or someone you love.

Why use assistive technology?

The most basic reason to use assistive technology is to make your life easier. Assistive technology might help you make adaptations and adjustments to your lifestyle that would allow you to be more independent and live in your own home safely. If you are caring for someone else, you might use assistive technology to make caregiving tasks easier. If you are aging with a disability, you may find that assistive technology can be helpful as you age and as your abilities change.

Assistive technology is another strategy that you can use to be more independent and less reliant on outside help. If you are a caregiver, assistive technology could reduce the number of hours of caregiving you provide, or lessen demands on you. Using assistive

technology might reduce the costs of in-home and long-term care.

What does assistive technology cost?

Assistive technology devices may range in cost from a few dollars for simple tools to thousands of dollars for highly specialized equipment. Sometimes, you can make your own devices from items already in the house, or you can put certain household items to use in a different way. For instance, a lazy Susan found in the bottom of a kitchen cupboard may actually be more useful on the countertop, where everyday cooking items can be placed for easy access.

Who pays for it?

At this time, most assistive technology is paid for by individuals and their families from their own personal funds. Almost all smaller tools are paid for in this way. Sometimes, for bigger items that are deemed medically necessary, Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance companies may help cover the cost. If you are a veteran, check with your local Department of Veterans Affairs.

Where can someone get assistive technology?

Medical supply stores and pharmacies usually carry some common assistive technology items. Others are available through catalogs or online retailers. Efforts are being made around the country to provide assistive technology through lending and sharing programs.

Below are just a few suppliers of assistive technology devices in a wide range of categories. You could also search the Internet for other suppliers.

Active Forever
www.activeforever.com
800-377-8033

AliMed
www.AliMed.com
800-225-2610

Gold Violin
www.goldviolin.com
877-648-8400

Sammons Preston
www.sammonspreston.com
800-323-5547

Sears Health and Wellness
www.searshealthandwellness.com
800-326-1750

Who can help me?

Consulting with an expert in assistive technology who can assess your situation may prevent frustration and wasted time and money. Many health care professionals can assist you in selecting and locating assistive technology that is best suited to your particular situation and needs. A local physician may be a good first referral source. Ask for help from an occupational or physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist. Each of these health care providers has a different specialty, so be clear about your challenges so that the best help can be provided. The Assistive Technology for Kansans Project is also able to assist you with questions regarding assistive technology.

Tell me more.

Following are a few descriptions of assistive technology devices in four different areas. There are thousands of possibilities. If a challenge exists for you, it is likely that a piece of equipment has been invented that may help you.

Personal care

- Buttoning tool to help with getting dressed
- Long-handled sponge to eliminate the need to bend down to wash legs/feet
- Large-handled toothbrush for limited grip

Meals

- Cutting board that holds food in place through the use of spikes and a raised edge
- Rubber pad to keep a plate from moving on the table
- Weighted silverware to help with tremors while eating

Household chores

- Long-handled dustpan to decrease the need to kneel or stoop
- Reacher to pick up items on the floor or overhead
- Stool for sitting during cooking, folding laundry, and other tasks

Recreational activity

- Card holder to ease strain from holding large amounts of playing cards

- Modified keyboard or mouse for the computer to reduce joint pain
- Bowling ramp to decrease strain on fingers, arms and shoulders

More information

If you are interested in learning more about assistive technology or related topics, please visit the K-State Research and Extension Adult Development and Aging Web site at www.aging.ksu.edu. The following organizations may also be of help:

Assistive Technology for Kansans (ATK)

The Assistive Technology for Kansans Program has five Assistive Technology Access Sites around the state and is coordinated by Kansas University's Center on Disabilities. The program's mission is to support individuals with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions in learning about and acquiring assistive technology devices and services they need for education, employment and living in the community. As part of this mission, ATK staff provide product information, device demonstration, training and information about short-term loans, as well as assistance in identifying public and private funds for some equipment. The Assistive Technology Access Sites are the point of contact for the Kansas Equipment Exchange (KEE) and the Kansas AgrAbility program. Through KEE, Kansans can donate durable medical equipment they no longer need or request a refurbished device if they need one. For more information on any of these services, call your regional AT Access Site (1-800-KAN-DO-IT) or visit <http://www.atk.ku.edu/>.

Adapted Clothing for Veterans

Sew Much Comfort is a nationwide organization that provides adapted clothing to soldiers with injuries. Clothing is altered by volunteers and distributed free of charge at military hospitals across the country and around the world. For information on how to help, or to receive clothing, visit www.sewmuchcomfort.org or call the regional director for Kansas, Linda Trumble, at 303-581-0708.

Arthritis Foundation, Kansas Chapter

The Kansas Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation helps individuals within its service area acquire equipment and personal care items that will enable them to take control of their arthritis. The chapter also awards scholarships for health and wellness programs based

on financial need. Assistance is not available to cover the cost of prescription drugs, doctor bills or medical treatments. The Arthritis Foundation also created an Ease-of-Use Commendation program. To view these products, visit www.arthritis.org/ease-of-use-new.php. For more information, visit www.arthritis.org, keyword "Kansas," or call 800-362-1108.

Catalog of Portable Electronic Devices for Memory and Organization

This Web site is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. This site focuses on assistive technology for those with challenges with their memory and in staying organized. View a variety of devices, including the price and manufacturer. To view the site, go to <http://www.biausa.org/Pages/AT/> or call 703-761-0750.

Kansas AgrAbility Project

Kansas AgrAbility is coordinated by Kansas State University and is part of a nationwide effort. The project's main mission is to help farmers with disabilities continue to work in agriculture. Assistive technology experts visit farmers and their families and make recommendations for tools and adaptations. For information, visit www.oznet.ksu.edu/agrability or call 1-800-KAN-DO-IT.

Kansas Department of Health and Environment

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) works to ensure that healthy Kansans are living in safe and sustainable environments. As part of this vision, the Arthritis Program works to teach Kansans how to prevent or delay the possibility of symptoms associated with arthritis. For more information, visit www.kdheks.gov or call 785-296-8150.

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America

This society is composed of people with an interest in both technology and disability, who work to improve people's lives through technology application. The society supports research and educational activities, and provides advocacy services. For more information, visit www.resna.org or call 703-524-6686 (Voice); 703-524-6639 (TTY).

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