

# **Assistive Technology for the Elderly**

The information taken from the “eldercarelocator” at 1-800-677-1116

[http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Assistive\\_Technology.aspx](http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Assistive_Technology.aspx)

## **Assistive Technology**

Assistive technology is any service or tool which can help an older person or a person with a disability perform activities that might otherwise be difficult or not be possible.

Such technology may be something as simple as a walker to make moving around easier or an amplification device to make sounds easier to hear (for talking on the telephone or watching television, for instance). It could also include a magnifying glass that helps someone who has poor vision read the newspaper or a scooter that makes it possible to travel over distances that are too far to walk. In short, anything that helps the elderly continue to participate in daily activities is considered assistive technology.

For many seniors, assistive technology makes the difference between being able to live independently and having to get long-term nursing or home-health care. For others, assistive technology is critical to the ability to perform simple activities of daily living, such as bathing and going to the bathroom.

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## **How Can I Tell if Assistive Technology is Right for Me?**

Older adults must carefully evaluate their needs before deciding to purchase assistive technology. Using assistive technology may change the mix of services that a senior requires or may affect the way that those services are provided. For this reason, the process of needs assessment and planning is important.

Usually, needs assessment has the most value when it is done by a team working with the senior in the place where the assistive technology will be used. For example, an older person who has trouble communicating or is hard of hearing should consult with his or her doctor, an audiology specialist, a speech-language therapist, along with family and friends. Together, these people can identify the problem precisely and can help select the most effective devices available at the lowest cost. A professional member of the team, such as the audiology specialist, can also arrange for any training that the senior and his or her family may require to use the equipment needed.

When considering all the options of assistive technology, it is often useful to look at the issue in terms of high-tech and low-tech solutions. Seniors must also remember to plan ahead and think about how their needs might change over time. High-tech devices tend to be more expensive but may be able to

assist with many different needs. Low-tech equipment is usually cheaper but less adaptable for multiple purposes.

## **How Can I Pay for Assistive Technology?**

Right now, no single private insurance plan or public program will pay for all types of assistive technology under any circumstances. However, Medicare Part B will cover up to 80% of the cost of assistive technology if the items being purchased meet the definition of “durable medical equipment.” This is defined as devices that are “primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose, and generally are not useful to a person in the absence of illness or injury.” To find out if Medicare will cover the cost of a particular piece of assistive technology, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227, TTY/TDD: 1-877-486-2048). You can also find answers to your questions by visiting <http://www.Medicare.gov>.

Depending on where you live, the state-run Medicaid program may pay for some assistive technology. Keep in mind, though, that even when Medicaid does cover part of the cost, the benefits usually do not provide the amount of financial aid needed to buy an expensive piece of equipment, such as a power wheelchair.

Seniors who are eligible for veterans’ benefits should definitely look into whether they can receive assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). Many people consider the DVA to have a model payment system for assistive technology because the agency has a structure in place to pay for the large volume of equipment that it buys. The DVA also invests in training people in how to use assistive devices. For more information about DVA benefits for assistive technology, call the VA Health Benefits Service Center toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS or visit the department’s website at: <http://www1.va.gov/health/index.asp>

Subsidy programs provide some types of assistive technology at a reduced cost or for free. Many businesses and not-for-profit groups have set up subsidy programs that include discounts, grants, or rebates to get consumers to try a specific product. The idea is that by offering this benefit, the program sponsors can encourage seniors and people with disabilities to use an item that they otherwise might not consider. Obviously, older adults should be careful about participating in subsidy programs that are run by businesses with commercial interests in the product or service because of the potential for fraud.

## **Where Can I Learn More About Assistive Technology?**

Most states have at least one agency that deals specifically with assistive technology issues. The Assistive Technology Act (Tech Act) provides funds to states for the development of statewide consumer information and training programs. A listing of state tech act programs is available at: <http://www.resnaprojects.org/nattap/at/stateprograms.html>

Some area agencies on aging (AAA) have programs or link to services that assist older people obtain low-cost assistive technology. You can call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit the website <http://www.eldercare.gov> to locate your local AAA. In addition local civic groups, religious and veterans' organizations, and senior centers may be able to refer you to assistive technology resources. The following resources provide information on assistive technology products and services.

**Disability.gov**

<http://www.disability.gov>

This site is designed to serve as a "one-stop" electronic link to an enormous range of useful information to people with disabilities and their families.

**ABLEDATA**

<http://www.abledata.com>

800-227-0216 or 301-608-8998

TTY 301-608-8912

ABLEDATA is a federally funded project whose primary mission is to provide information on assistive technology and rehabilitation equipment available from domestic and international sources to consumers, organizations, professionals, and caregivers within the United States. *Last Modified: 4/13/2012*

## **Catagories of Assistive Technology**

**Communication Aids** - Products and equipment designed to help persons with speech disabilities or writing difficulties to communicate. At its very simplest, augmentative communication can be a page with picture choices or alphabet letters that a person points to. It can also involve highly sophisticated speaking computers with on-screen communication boards and auditory or visual scanning.

**Computer Access Aids** - Hardware and software products that enables persons with disabilities to access, interact with, and use computers at home, work or school. Includes modified or alternate keyboards, switches activated by pressure, touch screens, special software, voice to text software, etc.

**Daily Living Aids** - Self-help devices that assist persons with disabilities in daily living activities such as dressing, personal hygiene, bathing, home maintenance, cooking, eating, etc. Includes reachers, adaptive clothing, modified eating utensils, adapted books, pencil holders, dressing aids, adapted personal hygiene aids, bathing accessories, feeding accessories, feeding devices, grab bars/grips/handles, grooming, hygiene, incontinent supplies, mechanical transfer lift, shower/bath chair, toileting accessories, transfer board, wheeled bath chair/commode, time management aids, specialized spoons for self-feeding, bathtub seats, etc. Does not generally include architectural/home adaptations or modifications (see Environmental Aids).

**Education and Learning Aids** – Devices to assist with note taking, organization, alternative learning styles, and other related factors such as cognitive and rehabilitation assistance.

**Environmental Aids** - Environmental and structural adaptations that remove or reduce physical barriers for individuals with disabilities. Environmental adaptations usually involve building

construction, engineering and architecture, but also include environmental controls and switches that can control an entire living environment.

**Ergonomic Equipment** - Low-tech assistive equipment or devices designed to reduce the likelihood of repetitive stress injuries often associated with work related situations. Includes adjustable workstations, industrial workstations, office workstations, adapted furniture, writing aids, modified seating and lighting, arm/wrist supports, back supports, etc. Does not generally include products intended to facilitate computer access and usage (see Computer Access Aids).

**Hearing and Listening Aids** - Products designed to assist the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. Includes assistive listening devices, hearing aids, infrared/personal amplification systems, audio/FM loop systems, FM amplification systems, TV amplifiers, TV decoders, visual signaling and alerting systems, tactile alerting systems, telephony and accessories, text telephones, TDDs/TTYs devices, adapted phones, etc. Does not generally include products intended to facilitate computer access and usage (see Computer Access Aids).

**Mobility and Transportations Aids** - Products that help mobility impaired persons move within their environment and give them independence in personal transportation. Includes standing/walking aids, transfer aids, stair lifts, walkers, scooters, wheelchairs and three-wheeled chairs, adapted bikes and Trikes, car seats/bed, stretchers, patient chairs, ramps, recliners, strollers, travel chairs, wheelchair trays, driving controls, seat belts, vehicle conversions, patient and wheelchair lifts, wheelchair loaders/carriers, wheelchair restraint systems, etc.

**Prosthetics and Orthotics** - Replacement, substitution or augmentation of missing or malfunctioning body parts with artificial limbs or other orthotic aids. Includes splints, braces, foot orthosis, helmets, restraints, supports, etc.

**Recreation and Leisure Aids** - Products that help persons with disabilities to participate in sports, social, cultural events. Includes modified sports equipment for skiing/biking/running/boating, audio description for movies, adaptive controls for video games, adaptive fishing rods, cuffs for grasping paddles or racquets, seating systems for boats, etc.

**Seating and Positioning Aids** - Products that provide mobility impaired persons with greater body stability, maintain upright posture, provide trunk/head support and reduction of pressure to the skin. Includes adapted and modular seating, cushions and wedges, contour seats, lumbar support seats, standing tables, positioning belts, braces, wheelchair modifications and cushions, seat lifts, bolster chairs, corner chairs, therapeutic seats, postural support hardware, postural support systems, pressure monitors, etc.

**Vision Reading Aids** - Products designed to assist the Blind and Visually impaired. Includes auditory and speech output devices, reading machines, scanning/document reading systems, OCR systems, electronic book readers, talking equipment (clocks/watches, calculators, etc.), Braille devices, Braille transcription and translation devices, screen magnifier/enlarger, closed circuit television (CCTV) for magnifying documents, book holders, manual and electric page turners, large button phones, speaker phones, large print books, taped/audio books, etc. Does not generally include products intended to facilitate computer access and usage (see Computer Access Aids).

**Services** - Support services for people with disabilities or their caregivers to help them select, acquire, or use adaptive devices. Services also include functional evaluations, training on or demonstration of devices, and purchasing or leasing devices.

**Taken from: RehabTool.com**     <http://www.rehabtool.com/at.html>