

Assistive Devices for Seniors

By Carole Larkin and Elaine Wiant

Q. What are assistive devices and who needs them?

A. An assistive device (or assistive technology) is anything that allows an individual to live more independently, improve productivity and enhance the quality of life. Devices range from something as simple as reading glasses or large-print playing cards to high technology items like voice-activated computers. Over 40 percent of people in the US over age 65 live with some kind of disability. Assistive devices can help seniors live longer and more independently. Of course, assistive devices can be used by people of all ages.

Q. My mother has macular degeneration and has trouble seeing. What assistive devices could help her?

A. There are many, many types of magnifying glasses and mirrors (lighted, handheld, desktop type magnifiers called CCTV's, and more) that may help her with reading. Other devices can improve her use of the telephone -- talking telephones, voice dialers, telephones with very large lettering, or Braille lettering. If she has trouble seeing the choices on the TV remote, try a large button remote. Other devices include talking watches, clocks, thermometers and calculators, or the same devices with very big, or Braille lettering, special lights that attach to walkers, a device that reads currency (paper money) and tells a person what denomination it is (example: \$1.00, \$5.00, \$10.00, etc...), even a device that will tell a person what is in a can of food or in a bottle! Contact Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind (214) 821-2375 for these and many more types of assistance.

Q. My father is hard of hearing but won't consider getting a hearing aid, is there anything else to help him hear?

A. Yes, there are alternatives that might help. Amplification devices can be put in a shirt pocket, worn around the neck, or on the belt instead of a hearing aid. They amplify **all** sound, so they will work better with less background noise than in a room where a number of people are talking at once. Devices with ear buds or headsets work with the TV so he can listen at a higher volume than others in the room. Telephones that raise the volume of the speaker's voice and also ring with a louder tone than normal can be useful. Other devices can turn lights on and off when the phone or doorbell rings or if the smoke alarm goes off. Similar devices, used in watches, alarm clocks and as pads that sit on the bed, vibrate to notify a person instead of making a very loud noise or flashing lights. Call the UTD/Callier Center - Dallas Campus, 1966 Inwood Road, Dallas TX 75235, main number: 214-905-3000, appointment desk: 214-905-3030 or UTD/Callier Center - Richardson Campus 811 Synergy Park Blvd., Richardson TX 75080, for appointments call: 972-883-3630 TDD: 972-883-3605.

Q. My mom has arthritis in her hands and no longer has a strong enough grip to use many of her household appliances, tools or her eating utensils. Are there devices to help her? Also, my dad has early stage Parkinson's disease and is beginning to have trouble getting dressed. Is there anything to help him?

A. Catalogues and online stores have many devices that can help people with a weak grip or uncontrolled movements. Many devices are available to help people with little arm strength or a weak grip open cans, bottles or even poke holes in boxes – special garden tools, too! Devices for people who can use only one hand include knives, peelers and pot and pan holders. People with a weak grip or shaking hands can use a device to push food onto their utensil without their fingers touching the food. They can also use dishes or plates that contain or minimize spills from shaky hands. Special devices can help people button or zip up their clothes and put on socks and shoes. Clothing made with Velcro closures instead of buttons and/or zippers is available.

Websites and telephone numbers for online stores and catalogues are listed below.

Before ordering from a website or a catalogue, check your local hardware, drugstores and discount stores. Items may be available there -- AND CHEAPER!!!

Websites for Assistive Devices:

www.enablemart.com

www.maxiaids.com

www.Activeforever.com

store.wrightstuff.biz

www.abledata.com

Catalogue stores for Assistive Devices:

Active and Able, 877-229-9993 weekdays 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Central Time.

LS&S, 800-468-4789 weekdays 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Central Time.

The Wright Stuff Health Care Products catalog, 877-750-0376 weekdays 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Central Time.

Clothing Solutions, 800-336-2660 weekdays 11:00 am to 7:00 pm Central Time.

Silvert's Clothing Company, 800-387-7088 weekdays 8:00am to 4:00 pm Central Time.

Contact ThirdAge Services for more information on these and other issues relating to older adults at 214-741-4397 or 214-649-1392 or ewiant@thirdageservices.com.

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