

## **ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY for AGING: MAINTAINING LIFESTYLES**

**As we grow older**, it is not uncommon to 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 a



movie using 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. AT devices are tools that allow you to do familiar tasks differently. AT services help you select, acquire or learn to use AT 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?** It's simple. When activities like operating the TV remote, getting in and out of a bathtub, car or bed, talking

on the telephone or remembering to take medications is unsafe, difficult or impossible, you need AT.

**Hearing** – Devices available for people who have a hearing loss include: vibrating personal pager systems and alarm clocks; telephone amplifiers; telephones with ringers that flash or display text of what the speaker is saying; telecommunications devices for the deaf; personal listening devices; FM and infrared systems that transmit and amplify sound; and hearing aids. Vibrating signal and alert systems indicate when a baby is crying, or when a fire alarm, telephone or doorbell is ringing. Televisions have built-in decoders for closed caption (CC) viewing which allows the individual to read what is being said.

**Vision** - Many simple devices help people with low vision: pens that write in bold-lines, preprinted bold or raised lined paper, magnifiers; print checks and deposit slips; writing guides that indicate where to write; telephones with large numbers and auditory feedback; self-threading needles; and large-print versions of popular games. Clocks, watches, thermometers, and blood sugar monitors have large-print or voice output. There is also a range of computer products for those with vision loss: character enlargement systems; Braille output

devices; voice output systems; scanning systems and audio tactile devices.

**Memory** - Devices for individuals who have memory-related problems help by reducing memory demands while supporting independence. Use appliances with automatic shut-offs such as coffee makers or irons to avoid problems that result from forgetting to complete tasks or activities. A microwave or toaster oven, with automatic turn off, reduces the risk of fires and burned foods. Reminder aids help prompt someone to turn off running water, go to an appointment or do the next step of a multi-step task. Devices are available to help people remember to take medications on schedule and at the correct dosage. Medication dispensers range from simple dividers for daily and weekly dosages to complex programmed devices. Programmable devices can be automated, have alarms, lock, organize and/or dispense a week's worth of medication. There are now many "apps" for today's smart phones and tablet computers (such as iPADS & Android devices) that can be used for memory and organization tasks.

**Home** - Modifying your home facilitates ease, independence and safety. Keep pathways and walkways of free objects or small rugs to prevent falls and maximize mobility around your home. Increase

light bulb wattage and install night lights to make sure living areas are well-lit. Doorways need to be wide enough to negotiate and easy to open. A doorway may be widened with an off-set door hinge or made more obvious with color contrasting trim. Adaptations to doorknobs include: ribbed or soft handle door grips; doorknob extensions; and lever or door loop turners. Use a remote controlled deadbolt or keyless entry system to make entering the home easier.

### **Mobility and Daily Living**

**Aids** - A wide variety of canes, crutches, walkers, scooters and wheelchairs are available to help move from place to place. If getting from one position to another is difficult, rotating disks make getting out of a car easier, seat assists make getting out of a chair easier, and bath benches and/or portable grab bars make safe bathing possible. Portable or installed ramps make it safer and easier to get in and out of your home if you use a wheelchair or walker

There are many devices that help to reach, carry, lift, or manipulate objects. Some of these include modified spoons, toothbrushes, razors and hairbrushes; single-lever faucets and hand-held showers; weighted cups and double-handled cups. Push/pull oven sticks; one-handed peelers, can openers, cutting boards; rocker knives; Lazy Susans

in the refrigerator and cupboards, and loop handles for knobs can be used in the kitchen.

Button hooks, cuff and collar button extenders, dressing sticks, and trouser pulls are effective dressing aids. Long shoehorns, bootjacks, stocking aids and elastic shoelaces help to put shoes on. Modify clothing using Velcro or make a zipper pull by attaching a key chain ring.

### **Recreation and Leisure**

Devices available to keep active in sports and recreation activities may 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. 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. A simple first step is to contact the **Arizona Technology Access Program**. Visit our website at [www.aztap.org](http://www.aztap.org) or call 800-477-9921, 602-728-9534; 602-728-9536 (TTY).

Reach us by email:  
[askaztap@nau.edu](mailto:askaztap@nau.edu) .



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56 statewide Assistive Technology (AT) Programs form a national network of statewide assistive technology (AT) programs. Information contained in this document represents the accumulation of knowledge of this national network. In Arizona this program is known as the Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP).

**AzTAP is a Phoenix-based program of the Institute for Human Development at Northern Arizona University.**



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