



Continuing Independent Living:

Assistive Technology and Aids for Daily Living



As our population continues to get older, there tend to be physical changes that impact how we interact with our environment. If these changes impact our vision, hearing, mobility, communication or just make everyday tasks more difficult, there is assistive technology (AT) available that can help make the change a more comfortable one. In many cases, the use of assistive technology can allow a person to continue living in their own home.

While there are many types of assistive technology, devices generally fall into three categories:

- 1) Low-tech AT is typically less expensive. This category often includes adaptations of devices that a person currently uses or devices that act as an extension of one's limbs. Some low-tech devices include canes and walkers, handheld magnifiers, large-print text, or grips for writing and food utensils.
- 2) In the middle is mid-tech equipment that might take more training or have more electronic features than low-tech devices. However, this category is not as complicated or intricate as high-tech AT. Examples include closed-captioning on television, books on tape, environmental control units and wheelchairs.
- 3) High-tech AT costs the most and is often more complex than the other types of AT. Training will likely be required for high-tech AT, which might include installation or thorough instructions on usage. AT that falls into this category would include power wheelchairs, voice-activated telephones and digital hearing aids.

"Aging in Place" is a term that describes the process in which one uses products or devices that enable one to continue living in their current residence. The National Aging in Place Web site (<http://www.naipc.org>) has vast resources that vary from figuring out how to remodel a home so it becomes more accessible to offering information on funding and financial planning.

The following is a list of information on the assistive technology that a person can use to help him or her age in place.

■ Home Safety

When determining whether or not a person should continue living in their own home, one often thinks in terms of safety. Everyone wants to make sure their friends and loved ones live happily in a safe environment.

Did you know there is assistive technology that can help with ...

- Mobility and balance, such as wheelchairs, walkers, canes, handrails, sloped walkways or lifts?
- Dressing oneself easily, such as buttoning a shirt, using a zipper, and putting on socks or shoes?
- Getting in and out of a car?
- Getting on and off the toilet?
- Getting in and out of the shower or bathtub?
- Reaching items that are too low or too high?

■ Vision

Vision loss due to conditions such as diabetes and macular degeneration is common among people over the age of 60. However, that should not stop a person from being able to complete daily activities such as driving a car or reading the newspaper.

Examples of AT that can help with vision loss include:

- Daily medication managers that enlarge prescription directions or allow one to record them verbally
- Telephones and remote controls with large buttons
- Talking caller ID for telephones
- Portable and handheld video magnifiers for reading books, bills or magazines
- Computer keyboards with enlarged keys
- Large print text
- Closed-captioning for TVs and movies
- Magnifying mirrors

■ **Hearing**

A multitude of hearing aids are now available, which is important because any one device will not work the same for each and every user of that device. In addition, there are several hearing-related AT products that make it easier to stay in your home safely if you have hearing loss.

Hearing-related AT can help with ...

- Being notified when someone is leaving or entering a room
- Waking up in the morning with extra-loud alarm clocks and bed shakers
- Being alerted to a fire by smoke detectors with strobe lights
- Being notified of incoming phone calls with flashing lights

■ **Speech**

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices are assistive technology devices that help those who have lost their ability to communicate, as sometimes happens to those who suffer a stroke. Speech and language therapy is often part of the treatment and rehabilitation after a stroke.

Nobody wants to lose the ability to communicate their thoughts to others, and augmentative and alternative communication devices can help one retain that essential part of their daily life.

AAC can help with ...

- Making decisions and completing tasks
- Communicating basic wants and needs
- Expressing important information to healthcare providers
- Executive functions, such as audio scheduling and voice-based notes or to-do lists
- Communication for people with mobility impairments by using technology that tracks the movement of their eyes.

■ **Memory and Cognition**

It is very important, too, for people who want to continue living in their home, to be able to remember things like the location of one's keys, turning off the stove or water faucet, and taking medication properly.

There is AT that can aid with ...

- Creating verbal to-do lists and reminders
- Pill reminder clocks with several alarms for taking medication

Much of this AT may already be in your pocket, taking the form of PDAs, cell phones and watches. Devices like the iPhone or Blackberry may help someone who has difficulty remembering lists or other information. Use of these everyday devices means making less of a change, plus they make it less "obvious" that the user requires extra memory assistance.

■ **Writing**

Arthritis is very common in people age 60 and older, yet they still must write checks, sign their name or write letters.

AT products that can help a person's writing include:

- Pens that are adapted to fit a person's hand better or allow them to write steadier
- Weighted pens that offer added stability
- Large-cushioned writing utensils for comfortable use

Resources in Indiana on Continuing Independent Living:

Easter Seals Crossroads has many resources including physical therapy and occupational therapy services, adult day services, and much more. Visit **www.eastersealscrossroads.org** for more information.

The INDATA Project has a loan library of assistive technology that allows potential buyers to try out devices before purchasing them. Visit **www.eastersealstech.com**.

www.icoil.org/centeril.aspx provides a link to resource centers for Independent living throughout the state of Indiana.

Indiana Association of Area Agencies on Aging advocates for quality programs and services for older adults and people with disabilities. Call (317) 818-0702, or visit **www.iaaaa.org**.

The Indiana Senior Games encourage the physical and mental health of Hoosier athletes through athletic competition each year. Visit **www.indianaseniorgames.com**.

Maxi Aids is a catalog of products for independent living. Visit **www.maxiaids.com**.

AARP is a membership organization leading positive social change and delivering value to people age 50 and over through information, advocacy and service. Visit **www.aarp.org**.



**Easter Seals
Crossroads**



ABOUT INDATA

The INDATA Project at Easter Seals Crossroads provides information and access to assistive technology, at no charge, for Hoosiers with disabilities.

These statewide services are derived through the Indiana Assistive Technology Act (INDATA) state/federal grant and include: device demonstrations, device loans, recycled computers, reutilized assistive technology equipment, alternative financing resources, and educational trainings and conferences.



Easter Seals
Crossroads



www.eastersealstech.com
317-466-2013 or 888-466-1314



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