



HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT

Assistive Devices

(Wheelchairs, Walkers, Canes & Other Devices to Help with Daily Tasks)

After stroke, a person may have trouble walking, talking or moving around. Tasks such as dressing oneself may be difficult. Assistive devices can help.

What Are Assistive Devices?

Assistive devices can help a person function better and be more independent. Assistive devices can make daily tasks easier. These devices may help ease the burden on you as a caregiver.

What Do You Need to Know?

There are many different assistive devices to choose from. They can range from simple to complex. Focus on your loved one's needs to guide you. Schedule an appointment with a physical or occupational therapist to assess your loved one. Ask questions about what devices would be best. Be sure to include your loved one in the decisions.

What Are the Different Types of Independent Living Aids?

Many devices are available to help with activities of daily living (ADLs). ADLs are the normal everyday tasks that people do. These include cooking, eating and house cleaning. ADLs also include personal care tasks like bathing and using the bathroom. Examples of helpful devices are listed below.

Kitchen aids help with cooking and feeding oneself:

- Rocker knives for one-handed cutting
- Easy to grip silverware
- Jar openers
- Reaching tools

Bedroom aids make moving around at night safer:

- Bedside commodes
- Transfer boards
- Night lights

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:
<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Bathroom aids help with bathing and toileting:

- Hand-held shower head
- Transfer bench for tub
- Shower chair
- Grab bars by toilet

Dressing aids make dressing oneself easier:

- Zipper pulls and Velcro[®]* tabs
- Elastic or non-tie shoelaces
- Easy-to-pull sock and panty hose aids

Grooming aids help with personal hygiene needs:

- Long-handled combs and brushes
- Electric toothbrushes
- No-rinse shampoo and body wash

What Are the Different Types of Mobility Aids?

Mobility aids help with walking or moving from place to place. They can help prevent falls and improve independence.

Gait belts and lift vests:

- Make lifts and transfers safer
- Provide secure handhold for caregivers when walking is unstable
- Help caregiver balance survivor

Canes:

- Decrease stress on the weak or affected leg
- Simple but effective walking tools
- Widen the base of support
- Various types of canes are available

Crutches:

- Provide support under the arm to take stress off the leg
- More stable than canes
- Various types of crutches are available

Walkers:

- Offer additional support to make up for lost strength
- Provide maximum stability
- Should be sized to fit user
- Various types of walkers are available

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

What Are the Different Types of Wheelchairs?

Wheelchairs are designed to help those who can no longer walk safely. They come in many shapes, sizes and varieties.

Manual wheelchairs:

- Depend on physical strength of the user or attendant
- Require arm or leg strength to move – unless there is someone to push
- Lightweight; easy to push and maneuver (dependent on weight of user)
- Less costly than motorized wheelchairs

Motorized or electric wheelchairs:

- Powered by battery or electricity
- Less physical exertion is required
- No one needs to assist user
- Your loved one must be able to make decisions and maneuver safely

Scooters:

- Work well for people who can get in and out of a chair
- Often less expensive than powered wheelchairs
- Easier to maneuver than a standard wheelchair

The Med Supply Guide has more information about wheelchairs. You can find their contact information in the "More Resources" section at the end of this fact sheet.

What Kinds of Financial Help Are Available?

No one insurance or public program covers all the costs of assistive devices. Some coverage will depend on the state you live in. Some assistive devices can be replaced free of charge every 3-5 years. Check with your social worker. See below for where you can find help paying for devices. The "More Resources" section at the end of this fact sheet has contact information for some of the resources below.

Department of Veterans Affairs – The VA provides assistive devices to Veterans who receive VA care. This is based on disability and service connection. Check with your local VA to determine what your loved one qualifies for. Start with your loved one's primary physician. The primary physician must approve the request for assistive devices. Once approved, a request will be placed in the computer. The device will then be provided through prosthetics, occupational or physical therapy. This will depend on the type of equipment.

VA Health Benefits Service Center – This center provides information on VA benefits for assistive technology.

Medicare – Benefits may include assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and scooters. Certain medical criteria must be met.

Medicaid – A program providing health coverage for lower income and disabled people. Benefits will vary by state.

Private Insurance – Insurance policies vary. Most policies cover at least some of the cost of assistive devices. Check with your insurance company to find out what is covered.

Associations and Foundations – Some associations and foundations will help pay for assistive devices, such as Disabled American Veterans.

Where Can You Buy Assistive Devices?

Check your phone book for medical equipment and supply stores. Ask your physical or occupational therapist. There are also on-line healthcare product stores. Look in the “More Resources” section at the end of this fact sheet for contact information.

Helpful Tips to Decide Which Assistive Devices to Use

- Think about what tasks your loved one needs and wants to do. Look for devices that would help with these tasks.
- Pick the simplest device to meet your loved one’s needs. Complex devices are often harder to use.
- Ask your healthcare team for advice. An occupational therapist (OT) or physical therapist (PT) can guide your decisions.

Remember

- Assistive devices can help your stroke survivor be more independent.
- Check with your local VA to see what assistive devices are available.
- Have your loved one evaluated by a physical or occupational therapist.

More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

Link Disclaimer: Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

AbleData

Web: <http://www.abledata.com>

Phone: 1-800-227-0216

AbleData is a Web site that provides information about assistive technology products. Go to the “Products” section to find out more.

Adaptive Information Resource Center

Web: <http://www.adaptiveirc.org>

E-mail: info@adaptiveirc.org

The Adaptive Information Resource Center provides information on adaptive sports and recreation options for people with disabilities. You can search for programs by state, find resources on traveling, and look for specific sports programs.

Caregiverproducts.com

Web: <http://www.caregiverproducts.com>

Phone: 1-877-750-0376

Caregiverproducts.com is an on-line healthcare products store.

Center for Assistive Technology & Environmental Access

Web: <http://www.assistivetech.net>

Phone: 1-800-726-9119

The Center for Assistive Technology & Environmental Access provides information on assistive devices and aids.

Department of Veterans Affairs

Web: <http://www.va.gov>

The VA has some funding for home modification projects through its Home Loans program. Go to this link: <http://www.homeloans.va.gov>

The VA Health Benefits Service Center provides information on VA benefits for assistive technology. Go to this link: <http://www.va.gov/health>

Disabled American Veterans

Web: <http://www.dav.org>

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) provides free services to help with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other government agencies. Click on “Find Your Local Office” for more information.

Family Caregiver Alliance

Web: <http://www.caregiver.org>

Phone: 1-800-445-8106

The Family Caregiver Alliance has a fact sheet called “Assistive Technology.” It describes the different types of aids and devices available. Go to this link:

http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=1412

MedlinePlus

Web: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>

MedlinePlus provides trusted health information on many topics. Search for mobility aids to find articles on canes and walkers.

Medicaid

Web: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicaid.asp>

Medicaid is a program that provides health coverage for lower income and disabled people. Benefits will vary by state. Benefits may include assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and scooters. Certain medical criteria must be met.

Medicare

Web: <http://www.medicare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-633-4227

Medicare is a program that provides health coverage for people age 65 or older.

My HealthVet

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has information on VA services, strokes and caregiving.

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

Sammons Preston

Web: <http://www.pattersonmedical.com>

Phone: 1-800-323-5547

Sammons Preston is an on-line healthcare products store.

References: Family Caregiver Alliance. (2005). *Fact Sheet: Assistive Technology*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from: http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=1412; Emedicine. (2009). *Assistive Devices to Improve Independence*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from: <http://emedicine.medscape.com>; Administration on Aging. (2009). *Assistive Technology*. Retrieved April 15, 2009, from: <http://www.aoa.gov>; About.com. (2009). *Assistive Devices for Disabled- Who Pays?* Retrieved April 15, 2009, from: <http://seniorhealth.about.com/library/weekly/aa093000a.htm>; Medline Plus. (2009). *Mobility Aids*. Retrieved May, 12, 2009, from: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>; Eldercare Locator. (n.d.). *Assistive Technology*. Retrieved May 12, 2009, from: <http://www.eldercare.gov/>



These materials were created for the project:

Web-Based Informational Materials for Caregivers of Veterans Post-Stroke

Project Number SDP 06-327 funded by VA HSR&D Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI)



*Brand names and types of medicines are provided as examples only. Their inclusion does not mean that these products are endorsed by VA or any other Government agency. Also, if a particular brand name is not mentioned, this does not mean or imply that the product is unsatisfactory.