



Assistive devices Info-sheet for seniors

There's a solution to most problems. If you find that you experience discomfort or fear doing activities you once loved, or if you've started to avoid certain situations, it's possible that an assistive device can help you overcome your difficulties.

This fact sheet provides information on assistive devices, their use and where you can obtain them. Canadians of all ages and situations have improved their quality of life, thanks to assistive tools that respond to their particular needs. Why wouldn't you?

What are assistive devices?

Assistive devices ease the strains of daily activities at home, at work or at play. They include medical equipment, mobility aids, information technologies, practical daily aids and gadgets to suit all tastes and needs.

The table on the next page lists certain devices that can considerably improve your quality of life. Find out how they can help you and don't hesitate to use them!

Why use them?

With age, loss of vision, hearing, bone density (osteoporosis) and balance can present serious health risks. Poor hearing, for example, is a condition that affects more than half of the people over 65 years of age and can put you at risk of misunderstanding crucial instructions, of falling as a result of loss of balance, of being deprived of phone calls or social meetings and of not hearing vehicles on the roadway—all of which can compromise your physical and mental health.

Don't let your disability or sensory loss infringe on your lifestyle, especially when tools and devices exist to help you overcome these obstacles.

Nothing to lose, everything to gain!

Assistive devices can have a positive impact on your mental health. By living the active, social life you desire, you remain independent, self-confident and positive. Use assistive devices with confidence. You'll become a model of initiative and good sense for others who are reluctant to enjoy their benefits!

At your service!

Task	Assistive devices	
Bathing	Grab bars, hand-held shower head, bath seat with arm rails, non-slip floor mat.	
Dressing	Long-handled shoehorn, Velcro fastenings, sock pullers, rubber gloves (for gripping tight-fitting stockings).	
Preparing food	Easy-to-grip utensils, side-opening oven door, height-adjustable cupboards and counters, automatic-stop kettle, pouring aid.	
Eating	Easy-to-grip utensils, specially designed dishes.	
Moving/physical activities	Cane, walker, wheelchair, slip-resistant flooring.	
Using the telephone	Loud-ringing phone, flashing light ring indicator, large numbers and buttons, automatic dialing.	
Doing the laundry	Main-floor laundry room, easy-access equipment, automatic-stop iron.	
Enjoying hobbies	Playing card holder, long-handled gardening tools, television remote control with large buttons and a captioning button.	
Entering the home	Loud doorbell or flashing light signal.	
Securing your home	Automatic light device, personal or home alarm system, cell phone, thermostat control.	

Whether you need a cane or a hearing aid, a wheeled garbage bin or an intercom system, a magnifying glass or a pill organizer—make sure you get them and use them! Improved health and quality of life are within your grasp.

Where do I start?

Start by consulting your physician or health centre if you think you need the aid of an assistive device. You can also obtain valuable information in catalogues and seniors' magazines.

Do I need a prescription?

Certain devices, such as eyeglasses and hearing aids obviously require an expert's assessment, but many assistive devices for the enhancement of daily life are easily obtainable in general and specialty stores. For other, more expensive assistive devices like a wheelchair, it's advisable to go to a professional, especially if you think you may qualify for a complete or partial reimbursement from a funding or insurance agency. Any form of reimbursement generally requires that you undergo an assessment and obtain a prescription for the more expensive assistive devices.

Where can I find assistive devices?

Eyeglasses and hearing aids are available through specialists (see the yellow pages for a list of specialists under *Opticians* and *Hearing Aids*). Your doctor could probably provide you with a list of specialists.

Devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, bath seats and grab bars are all available from stores that sell *Medical Equipment and Supplies* or *Wheelchairs* (see the yellow pages under these headings for a list of stores). Before buying one, consider

consulting a specialist such as an occupational therapist (a cane, for example, needs to be of proper weight, length and handle for you). Also consider borrowing or renting the device to find out whether it serves your needs, especially if you're choosing between more than one device, like whether to invest in a wheelchair or a walker.

Specialty computer stores carry items like screen-reading software that include screen-enlargement features for individuals with reduced vision. Voice recognition systems and modified keyboards and mice are also available for people with mobility and dexterity limitations.

Qualified pharmacy personnel are usually quite happy to provide information on a variety of other available products: magnifying glasses, bath seats, joint support bandages, pill organizers, canes, etc.

Universal design

More and more products are being designed for use by anyone regardless of age or capacity level. This approach is called "universal design"—it improves ordinary products to accommodate the daily living needs of seniors and handicapped persons, as well as the general population.

Hardware stores offer many “universal design” kitchen utensils, as well as other items for home use, such as easy to move wheeled garbage bins or intercom systems that allow you to communicate with someone at your door without having to rush to answer it.

Get help finding what you need. Don't hesitate to ask friends (or anyone!) where they got their automatic card shuffler, playing card holder, or any other useful gadgets or aids that could improve your daily life in any way.

Who pays?

Some provinces and territories have programs to help seniors or people with disabilities purchase the assistive devices they need at affordable prices or can even help with obtaining a bank loan.

Certain community and non-profit organizations such as the Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions Club or the Royal Canadian Legion may offer advice or assistance for procuring assistive devices. Friends and family may also be willing to contribute, if they can, to the cost of your assistive devices or in helping you find the devices or fill out the necessary forms.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) offers a wide variety of programs and services to veterans and other eligible clients. The health care program, Aids for Daily Living, assists clients with the purchase of assistive devices such as prosthetic and orthotic devices, walkers, canes, wheelchairs, etc. To learn more about the programs, services and funding offered by VAC, contact your regional office (see the blue pages of your telephone directory under Government of Canada). If you have access to the Internet, you can visit the VAC website at: www.vac-acc.gc.ca

Q. If I use an assistive device, won't I appear older?

A. Absolutely not! Unless appearing older involves having good sense, independence and confidence.

*For more on assistive devices,
see the publication *Go for it!* available at:
Division of Aging and Seniors
Public Health Agency of Canada
200 Eglantine Driveway, Address Locator 1908A1
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9
Tel: 613-952-7606
Fax: 613-957-9938
TDD/TTY: 1-800-267-1245
E-mail: seniorspubs@phac-aspc.gc.ca
Web site: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines*

This info-sheet is available in alternative formats upon demand.

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Provincial and territorial contact information

Alberta

Alberta Health and Wellness: toll-free in Alberta: dial 310-0000, then 780-427-7164

Aids to Daily Living: toll-free in Alberta: dial 310-0000, then 780-427-0731

British Columbia

Ministry of Health Services, Health Information Line:
1-800-465-4911 (toll-free); 250-952-1742

Ministry of Human Resources, Enhanced Medical Coverage

Health Benefits Branch: 1-888-221-7711 (toll-free)

Disability Benefits: 1-800-337-3531 (toll-free)

Manitoba

Manitoba Health Office: 1-866-626-4862 (toll-free)

TDD/TTY: 204-945-4796

Home Care Equipment Program: 204-945-3744

New Brunswick

Department of Family and Community Services: 506-453-2001

Newfoundland and Labrador

Health and Community Services: 1-888-709-2929 (toll-free); 709-729-4984

TDD/TTY: 1-888-709-3555 (toll-free)

Northwest Territories

Department of Health and Social Services, Health Benefits Programs:
1-800-661-0830 (toll-free); 867-777-7400

Nova Scotia

Department of Health: 1-800-387-6665 (toll-free); 902-424-5818;

TDD/TTY: 1-800-670-8888 (toll-free)

Nunavut

Department of Health and Social Services: 867-975-6000

Ontario

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Infoline:
1-800-268-1154 (toll-free); 416-314-5518; TDD/TYY: 1-800-387-5559 (toll-free)
Assistive Devices & Home Oxygen Program:
1-800-268-6021 (toll-free); 416-327-8804;
TDD/TTY: 1-800-387-5559 (toll-free); 416-327-4282

Prince Edward Island

Department of Social Services: 902-368-6520;
Seniors Infoline: 1-866-594-3777 (toll-free)

Quebec

Ministry of Health and Social Services: 1-800-707-3380 (toll-free)
Health Insurance Plan: 1-800-561-9749 (toll-free)
Québec: 418-646-4636; Montréal: 514-864-3411
Handicapped Services: 1-800-567-1465 (toll-free); 819-475-8585
TDD/TTY: 1-800-567-1477 (toll-free)

Saskatchewan

Health Registration Branch: 1-800-667-7551 (toll-free); 306-787-3475
Aids to Independent Living Program: 306-787-7121

Yukon

Department of Health and Social Services: 1-800-661-0408 (toll-free);
867-667-5209
Pharmacare and Extended Health Care Benefits Program: 867-667-5403



Computer aids

Adapted kitchen

Card shuffler