



When it comes to assistive devices, you're in a great position to help your clients. For example, you might:

- Notice a problem with one of your clients that could be solved if the client had an assistive device.
- Observe—and report—that a client is using a device *improperly* and needs additional training.
- Encourage a client to use an assistive device that he has been reluctant to use.

Published March, 2010

Assistive devices are used for mobility, dressing, grooming, eating and more!

An “Assistive Devices” Fact Sheet

Just for You from In the Know!

USING ASSISTIVE DEVICES

What do a shoelace, a magnifying glass and a computer all have in common? They can each be used as an assistive device!

Assistive devices are tools that help people function independently—despite physical limitations or disabilities. Assistive devices help people perform daily activities, such as eating, dressing, talking, walking and driving. Some assistive devices are elaborate “store-bought” machines. Others are hand-made creations.

There are “low tech” assistive devices, such as a spoon with a large easy-grip handle. Some devices are “medium-tech” such as a reaching

tool with a claw for picking things up. There are also “high tech” assistive devices, such as a motorized scooter. In all, there are more than **twenty thousand** assistive devices on the market today!

Over 50 million Americans—including some of your clients—have some kind of disability. Assistive devices can help them open a door, put on shoes, pick up a newspaper, eat a meal, read a book or write a letter. In addition to making it easier to get through the day, using assistive devices may help relieve pain and conserve energy.

WHO USES ASSISTIVE DEVICES?

Assistive devices are used by people who:

- Have temporary or permanent physical limitations.
- Are elderly.
- Have cognitive problems, such as memory loss.
- Have problems with their hearing or vision.

- Have a physical condition that causes them to tire out easily.
- Are recovering from surgery.

Assistive devices can really make a difference! For example, surveys have shown that when elderly people are given appropriate assistive devices, eighty percent of them will be less dependent on others and up to half of them will be able to live in their own homes longer.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH ASSISTIVE DEVICES

- Don't let your clients use towel racks or toilet paper holders to help them stand. If they seem to need a grab bar, report the situation to your supervisor.
- If your clients like to carry personal items with them, but have trouble holding them, suggest that they wear an apron with large pockets.
- Try tying a ribbon to your client's zipper for a "homemade" zipper pull!
- Remember that a cane should always be held on the client's strong side—unless otherwise directed by a physical therapist. The handle of the cane should be at the person's hip joint.
- Don't let clients rest their weight on their armpits when using axillary crutches. Instead, their hands should bear their weight.
- Discourage your clients from picking up their walkers and carrying them. (If you see a client doing this, let your supervisor know. Maybe the client no longer needs a walker!)
- Keep an eye on each client's range of motion. If a client has limited movement in certain joints, there are many assistive devices that can help make life easier.
- Your clients may need reminders of how to use a particular assistive device—even if they've been instructed in its use before. Be patient and show them again. If you don't know how either, ask for help and/or report the problem.
- Thorough documentation can be very important for reimbursement of assistive devices. For example, an insurance company may not pay for Mrs. Parker's walker if her aide documents that she walks okay by herself—but the therapist documents that the client needs assistance. Be sure to document the facts about your clients clearly and completely!

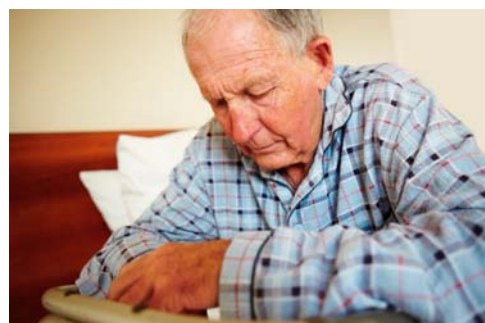
Nearly 65% of all assistive devices are paid for by the individuals who use them.

HELPING YOUR CLIENTS ADAPT

Keep in mind that some people need time to adjust to a new physical limitation. If you try to rush your clients to use a device before they have dealt with the emotional impact of their disability, they may reject the device.

You can impact how well your clients adapt to their need for assistive devices by:

- Being a good listener. Let your clients express their feelings about an assistive device.
- Remembering that your clients may be grieving over the loss of their independence and may need some time to get over the sadness.
- Introducing your clients to other people who are using the same device successfully.



About one third of all assistive devices are abandoned—usually within the first three months of use.

- Focusing on what your clients are still able to do...not on what they can't do.
- Emphasizing the positive aspects of an assistive device.

*For more information on this issue, please check out our inservice entitled **Using Assistive Devices**.*