

## Assistive Devices

An assistive device is a tool or implement that makes a particular function easier or possible to perform. An assistive device may be as simple as an electric toothbrush, or as elaborate as an environmental control system that can be operated with a mouth switch by persons who have lost the use of their limbs.

Assistive devices can help persons with disabilities perform many activities of daily living.

- **Bathing and Showering:** Tub and wall grab bars can help persons with MS get in and out of the bathtub and keep their balance while showering.
- **Grooming and Dressing:** Button and zipper hooks can be used to fasten clothes. Velcro on clothes and shoes or elastic shoelaces can make it easier to get dressed. Combs, brushes, and toothbrushes can be fitted with easier-to-hold handles.
- **Cooking and Housekeeping:** Devices such as electric can openers, rocker knives that minimize wrist motion and strength needed to cut, and cookware designed for those with limited hand, wrist, and forearm strength can make cooking manageable. The heavy lifting and bending often involved in housekeeping can be minimized by putting cleaning supplies and equipment on wheels and by using long handled dusters, brooms, and sponges. Reachers can help grasp objects on shelves or in closets.
- **Writing and Reading:** Special grips have been designed to enable persons to securely, yet comfortably, grip a pen or a drawing implement. Special lenses and magnifying devices may correct some visual problems associated with MS.
- **Mobility:** Braces, canes, or walkers can help those who have trouble walking. Wheelchairs and electric scooters can provide mobility for those who need additional assistance. Transfer boards and lifts can be used to help people with MS get in and out of a bed, tub, automobile, or wheelchair.
- **Driving:** After assessment by an occupational therapist, driving may be safely accomplished with the help of hand controls, low-energy steering wheels, and other aids.

Assistive devices are usually prescribed by a physiatrist, or by an occupational, physical, or speech/language pathologist, following referral by a physician. There are many catalogues and surgical supply stores that are excellent sources for assistive devices.

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## See also...

### Sourcebook

- ABLEDATA
- Center for Assistive Technology (Project Link)
- Gait
- Rehabilitation
- Visual Loss
- Visual Symptoms

### Society Web Resources

- Life Planning and Independence  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Planning](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Planning)
- Spotlight: Modifications for Work and Home  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Modifications](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Modifications)
- Spotlight: MS and Employment  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Employment](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Employment)
- Spotlight: MS and Fatigue  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Fatigue](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Fatigue)
- Spotlight: MS and Mobility  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Mobility](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Mobility)
- Spotlight: MS and Vision  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Vision](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Vision)
- Spotlight: Rehabilitation in MS  
[www.nationalmssociety.org/Rehab](http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Rehab)

### Book

Kalb R. (ed.) *Multiple Sclerosis: The Questions You Have; The Answers You Need* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2004.

—Ch. 5 Physical Therapy

—Ch. 6 Occupational Therapy

—Ch. 7 Speech and Voice Disorders

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information about multiple sclerosis. Our comments are based on professional advice, published experience, and expert opinion, but do not represent individual therapeutic recommendations or prescription. For specific information and advice, consult your personal physician.

To contact your chapter, call **1-800-FIGHT-MS** (1-800-344-4867) or visit the National MS Society web site: [www.nationalmssociety.org](http://www.nationalmssociety.org).