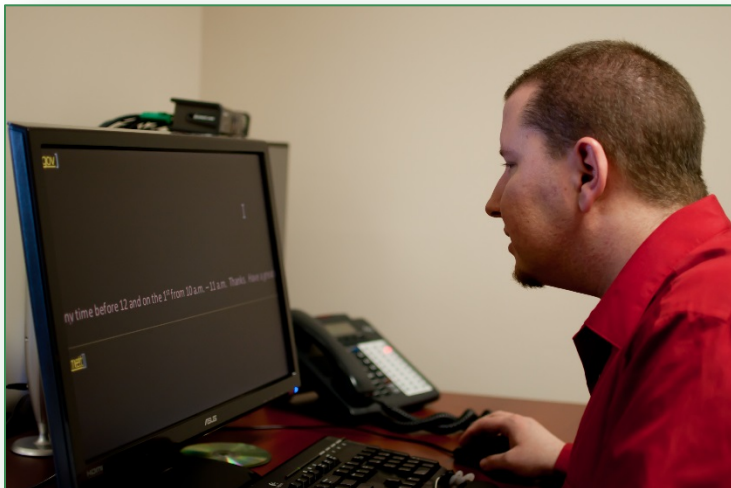# Tips for Choosing AT Products for Yourself

Your Opinion Matters

We all use technology to help us complete many different kinds of tasks. Cars, computers and cell phones are all tools many of us use regularly. Assistive technology (AT) products help people with disabilities and others who have difficulty performing certain tasks with a wide range of daily activities. For example, walkers assist individuals with balance and fatigue problems to get around and speech output software helps people who are blind use computers at work. These products help us remain as independent as possible in our daily lives.

Since every person is unique and there are many assistive devices available, choosing the best assistive device for yourself can be tricky. Research over the past 20 years consistently shows that AT users eventually stop using about 30% of products they have obtained. It is a good thing to discard a device that you no longer need because you have improved. However, you don't want to waste time and money on a device that does not work well for you. You are the one who will be living with the device, so it is important that you participate in the decision-making process.

Determine What You Need Help With

The AT selection process can be fairly easy or very complex. You may be buying a reacher from a catalog with your own money or you may be working with a clinician or counselor who will do an assessment and authorize payment for a sophisticated product like a power wheelchair or communication aid. Before you start looking at specific devices, it is important to have a good idea of the needs you want to address. Ask yourself these questions:

What tasks do I want to accomplish?
What activities do I need assistance to complete? How important are these activities to my sense of well-being, independence, and participation? How do I feel about using technology to help me with this? Would I feel better getting help from a person instead?

Where will I be using this device?
Will I use this product at home, work, out in the community? All of these places?

Will family members or other caregivers be assisting me with the device?
Will I need personal assistance to use the device in any way? If so, to what degree and how will it affect my level of independence?

Is professional help required?
Do I need to learn more about AT products that might help? Do I need a comprehensive assessment to get an appropriate device? Might health insurance cover the costs of this device?

Find a Product that Works for You

Once you have determined your needs, the next step is to evaluate products. What general factors should you consider in weighing the pros and cons of devices that might address your needs? In many ways, these elements are similar to what you would think about before you buy a car, computer, washing machine, etc. Research on AT users' satisfaction suggest the following features are most important:

Performance
Does the device work well? Does it help me do what I need to do?
Is it easy to use? Will I have to be trained to operate the device? Is it easy to set up?
Is it dependable?
If required, will it work with other technologies I use?

Comfort
Is the device physically comfortable?
Will it likely cause pain, strain, or fatigue?

Cost
Is the device affordable to purchase? Maintain?

Appearance
Is the device attractive?
Do the style, size and weight work for me?

Availability
Can I see the device or try it out?
Is there convenient technical support available?

Experienced AT users say a good device is:

- ✓ Effective
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Reliable
- ✓ Comfortable
- ✓ Reasonably priced
- ✓ Attractive

Overall
Will this product be valuable in helping me participate in
activities that are important to me, feel confident in doing those activities, and make my life easier? Do I have realistic expectations about how the device will perform?

These tips are very general and can be applied to many types of products. There are more questions about product features that you may need to explore to determine if a specific device will work for you.

For example, factors in ease of use will be different for a software program than for a scooter. If you think through these questions, you will be able to narrow down options that would work best for you.

One last tip: Talk to people who have used the product you are considering. They can share their experiences and offer insight about the kinds of questions you may want to ask before you make your purchase.

For More Information

If you need help choosing a product, a good place to start is your state Assistive Technology Act Program. These programs offer information about devices and services that are available in your area and funding resources for purchasing and acquiring devices. Some states have device loan and demonstration centers and device exchange and recycling programs that provide you with used equipment at little to no cost. To find the AT Act program in your state go to: http://resnaprojects.org/allcontacts/statewidecontacts.html

Some area agencies on aging (AAA) have programs or link to services that assist older people to obtain low-cost assistive technology. You can call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit the website http://www.eldercare.gov to locate your local AAA.

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