

AT Information and Resources for Veterans with Disabilities

Over the last decade, changing combat strategies have dramatically impacted service men and women. For example, a high reliance on explosive mechanisms, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), has created new injury patterns for those in the military. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), bone and/or muscle injuries comprise 50 percent of all combat wounds sustained in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. As veterans return to civilian life, many now face the challenges of learning how to live with a lost limb, muscle damage, traumatic brain injuries, or a combination of injuries.

While these challenges will require mental and physical adjustments, the use of assistive technology (AT) such as adaptive and rehabilitation equipment, can make it possible for wounded veterans to continue to live productive lives. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports that the number of veterans using prosthetics, sensory aids, and other related devices has increased more than 70 percent since 2000. The use of AT, tailored to their unique needs, is allowing more and more service men and women to regain their independence.



Success Stories

Veteran Private first class (PFC) Kenny Adams, who has a visual impairment, relies on voice-output devices and other AT to get through his daily routines. In 2005, while in Afghanistan, PFC Adams was struck by a bullet, leaving him with a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Medics only gave him 24 hours to live at first, but PFC Adams recovered, with the exception of his eyesight. Once notified of his condition, the VA provided him with a talking barcode scanner and a prescription reader—he is now able to identify common objects around his house and create new barcodes for identifying other items. According to his wife, “He’s only grown stronger [with his rehabilitation equipment]”.

Another Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran, Lieutenant Jason Pak, relies on AT to move. While touring in Southern Afghanistan, Lt. Pak stepped on an IED and lost both legs and two of his fingers. With the use of various AT, including prosthetic legs, a cane, manual and power

wheelchairs, and a walker, he is able to perform all sorts of tasks. Just 82 days after his final amputation surgery, Lt. Pak was able to stand with the help of prosthetic legs and a walker next to his father, Colonel YT Pak, during his retirement ceremony from the service. With the use of his new legs and other AT, the former West Point soccer player is also working to get back on the soccer field and continue his military career.

Helpful Resources

PFC Kenny Adams and Lt. Jason Pak are two military personnel who sustained serious injuries; however, their situations are not uncommon. Nearly 27 percent of veterans living in the United States hold a disability status. Military Health System (www.health.mil) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA; www.benefits.va.gov/benefits) offer evaluation systems and programs to help wounded service men and women receive the AT and support they need to lead healthy, functional lives.

The use of AT is different for everyone and is determined on a case-by-case basis. After receiving a disability classification through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES; www.benefits.va.gov/PREDISCHARGE/disability-exams.asp) and being evaluated by an occupational therapist, doctor, or physical therapist, you can utilize online resources to find products for your everyday needs.

AT can range from being high-tech, such as computer software and electronic gadgetry, to low-tech, such as ergonomic cushions and chairs. The following is a list of popular online resources for information on AT products and other rehabilitation equipment:

- AbleData (<https://abledata.acl.gov/>): AbleData provides free access to an online database of information on over 40,000 AT products. Information Specialists are also able to help callers find a product or manufacturer that suits their needs. (1-800-227-0216)
- AbleNet (www.ablenetinc.com/Assistive-Technology/Applications-of-AT/AbleNet-Veterans-Page): AbleNet is an online product and informational resource. They also provide brief webinars on how to use various AT devices.
- EnableMart (www.enablemart.com): EnableMart is an online database that provides products designed for a residence or for accommodations at a place of business.

Funding Resources and Advocacy Organizations

Other agencies and organizations exist to help you fund your devices and support you through your transition. The following list of organizations provide various services:

- Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) (www.cap.mil): CAP is a centrally funded program that provides AT and reasonable accommodations to veterans with disabilities. They especially strive to get veterans the equipment they need to participate in the workforce.
- Wounded Warrior Project (www.woundedwarriorproject.org): The Wounded Warrior Project is a nonprofit organization that provides services to those who served from Sept. 11, 2001 onward. The program caters to both mental and physical health needs.
- Disabled American Veterans Charity (DAV) (www.dav.org): DAV is an advocacy group that provides free assistance to veterans with disabilities to ensure they receive the benefits they need to transition into their new lifestyle.

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