

## Adaptive Equipment

Adaptive equipment often makes the difference between a life of independence and a life of limitation. Assessing each person's needs, desires and limitations, along with the range of equipment now available, are important steps toward greater independence.

Keeping informed about the latest equipment and tools will help you make good purchases, or think of new uses for common, everyday objects. Many different kinds of equipment are now available through physical and occupational therapists, catalogs, web sites and even the big box store. No matter what you use, the goal is always the same – to participate in more activities, as independently as possible, in a comfortable and safe manner. The following guidelines will help you find the right equipment.

### Some Absolute Guidelines for equipment

- Remember that each person is unique; one size does not fit all!
- Try it before you buy it!
- Bracing, wheelchairs, custom seating systems and splints need to be perfect!

### Develop a User Profile

By learning more about the user's needs, wants and desires, along with their physical capabilities, you'll do a much better job of finding the right piece of equipment.

- Does the person with OI fatigue quickly?
- Is short stature an issue?
- How strong is the person?
- Does the person already use a mobility aid like a walker or wheelchair?
- Is weight bearing possible?
- Is the person able to walk only in the home or also out in the community?
- Are there any limitations in completing routine activities of daily living?
- Does the person have full range of motion in their arms?
- How old is the person? Is he/she still growing?
- How about bracing?
- Recent fractures or surgery?

### Determine where the equipment will be used

- Will it be in a car or other vehicle to help with driving?
- Will it be used at home, school or on the job?
- Are there needs related to playtime and recreation?
- Are there needs related to housekeeping or personal care?
- Will the equipment be used indoors or outside?
- Will weather (rain, cold, snow, heat) be a factor?
- Will the equipment be needed for only a short while, or permanently?

### Think Creatively

Adaptive equipment is one way of managing OI. With a little training and practice it can make it possible to do any number of things independently.

- As precisely as possible, describe what you want to do.
- Think creatively about how the task could be done.
- Describe the current limitations; describe the perfect solution
- Try to bridge the two

## Find the Solution

Sometimes the exact piece of equipment is readily available, other times you will need to improvise or purchase from a specialized source. A little creative problem solving is the best solution to control cost and get an exact fit, or when the item is only going to be used for a short period of time or it is not easily available. Leafing through catalogs for children's or senior's equipment or furniture, taking a field trip to the home center or a big box store can help you come up with just the right idea to help you:

- Put a standard household item to a new use
- Make simple modifications to a readily available item
- Find people who are handy with tools

## Discover what is available

Many, many products are available readymade that can solve some of your special needs. Catalogs and advice are available from physical and occupational therapists especially for the big ticket items like wheelchairs. Internet shopping sites are available for disability or senior products, and for child size products that solve some short stature needs. Sturdy pieces of furniture that can be customized are available from unpainted furniture stores. Resource centers have information about more technical and sophisticated equipment. Home improvement books and magazines, especially those with articles about "Universal Design" often have practical suggestions. The more you know and the more willing you are to "think outside the box," will help you get a good fit from your next piece of adaptive equipment.

## Some examples

*Problem: The school desk's chair is too large and the child's feet dangle above the floor.*

Simple Solution: Use a child size step stool, or a wood box, or heavy plastic box as a foot rest.

*Problem: Your child would like a work/play station that is low to the floor.*

Simple solution: Purchase a bean bag chair that fits the child. Build a work surface by attaching a pre-cut shelf from the home center to paint pails or replacing the legs on a typical child size table with shorter legs.

*This article is based on a*

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