If you are missing a limb, you’ve probably found ways to adapt in your daily life, whether it’s through technological assistance like a prosthesis or by simply rearranging the furniture in your household. Following are some products, adaptations and tips that may assist you or give you more ideas about ways to make daily tasks easier.

**Commercially Available Products**

Rehab Ideas (rehabideas.com) is a company that grew out of Professor Stephen Sundarrao’s senior capstone course in mechanical engineering at the University of South Florida. In it, he called for students to develop practical products using innovative technology. The students’ designs were so good that Sundarrao decided to market some of them. So far, the company has created several products for wheelchair users.

One product is the Off-Road Wheelchair Kit, available for $4,495, which consists of a base platform powered by the wheels of a power wheelchair. Another device is the Sideways Wheelchair Kit, which attaches to a rear-wheel-drive power wheelchair to enable the wheelchair to move sideways and access tight spaces. Both kits allow the user to move on uneven or constricted terrain. Other products include an automatic backpack retrieval device that can be mounted on most wheelchairs and a swiveling, adjustable tray that hides away under a wheelchair arm. An aluminum crutch that folds small enough to fit into a purse is in the works.

Sundarrao notes the growing number of power wheelchair users fuels an increasing demand for this type of technology. “We are committed to inventing and bringing to market solutions like this one that tackle everyday problems for wheelchair users and allow them more independence and convenience in their daily activities,” he says.

Similarly, Mobility4kids (mobility4kids.com) provides the means for children to go places they can’t in a wheelchair. The company offers a line of customized, battery-powered Go Karts that, equipped with the proper tires, can go on beaches, campgrounds and other outdoor locations. The Go Karts come with either a joystick controller or steering wheel and have several seating options.

Another product that helps people with limb loss go places is the magnetic bicycle pedal from ProTos Locks.
The pedal is usable in all bicycle sports. The magnets secure the rider’s shoe to the pedal via a metal plate that can be attached to both hard and soft riding shoes.

“These pedals make it so much easier to ride a bike, and I am sure they would do wonders for any other amputee out there,” says Kurt Yaeger, whose left leg was amputated below the knee after a motorcycle accident.

Andrea Tannenbaum, president of Dynamic Living, Inc. (dynamic-living.com), knows the difficulties people with upper-extremity limb loss face in daily activities, right down to getting dressed. “You may have trouble with the buttons, zippers or snaps,” she says. “All you know is that your clothing has become the enemy.” Tannenbaum suggests some products that may be useful to those with upper-extremity limb loss.

- Swap your existing shoelaces for elastic shoelaces, she says. They stretch so your foot can slide into the shoe without untying the laces each time.

- Brassieres can be nearly impossible to get together if you are single-handed. Some women have discovered that it’s helpful to close the bra in front and then twist the closure around to the back. A Bra-Angel assists with this maneuver, holding one end of the bra in place so it is easy to bring both ends together.

- Single-handed people might find it difficult to pull up pants and underwear. Pant Clips can help. Similar to suspenders, they clip onto the front of the pants. Once the pants are up, the clips can be removed and tucked into a bag or fanny pack for later use.

- Belts with buckles can be nearly impossible for people with limited dexterity or only one hand. An Easy-to-Close Belt snaps onto your belt loop, holding it in place while you tighten the belt. It closes with a hook and loop strip.

Dynamic Living also has a number of voice-activated appliances, including TV remotes, alarm clocks, and telephones and telephone dialers, which Tannenbaum calls “an ideal solution for someone who finds it hard to physically dial a telephone.”

There are also many different reachers on the market. These are long devices with triggers on the handles and hooks or pincers on the end that allow people with limited mobility or reach to grasp faraway objects. A recent modification to the TeleStik® (www.telestik.com) Portable Reacher. Less than 8 inches long when stored, the TeleStik can fit into a fanny pack or purse. It can extend up to 34 inches and uses three pick-up mechanisms: an adhesive that picks up objects weighing up to a pound, a magnet that picks up metal objects up to one pound and a standard hook.

Many other accessories for everyday tasks are on the market. For example, the TeleStik® (www.telestik.com) Portable Reacher. Less than 8 inches long when stored, the TeleStik can fit into a fanny pack or purse. It can extend up to 34 inches and uses three pick-up mechanisms: an adhesive that picks up objects weighing up to a pound, a magnet that picks up metal objects up to one pound and a standard hook.

Daily living accessories such as voice-controlled lamps, light switches and phones, doorknob-turners, button aids, dressing sticks, one-handed cutting boards, universal handcuffs with Velcro® straps, mouth-controlled
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Adaptable Accessories
Aids for daily living for people with limb loss needn’t be costly or dependent on advanced technology. In Adapt My World, author J. Rose Plaxen offers dozens of suggestions for adapting everyday objects to be more user-friendly.

Although her recommendations are primarily aimed at children with developmental challenges, many of Plaxen’s ideas can be used by people with limb loss too. For instance, for people with limited dexterity, she suggests putting milk and other liquids into pump dispensers (such as might be used for condiments). She notes that Velcro® fasteners can replace buttons and zippers that may be difficult to manipulate with one hand. Alternately, long key chains or lengths of string may be looped through the opening in a zipper pull to make it easier to pull. For wheelchair/ walker users, Plaxen writes that duct-taping thick washcloths or fleece around the arms make inexpensive arm protectors. Attaching a bicycle basket to the front of a walker creates an easy, inexpensive way to carry small items.

In One-Handed in a Two-Handed World, Tommye-Karen Mayer gives hundreds of simple, cost-effective tips for completing daily activities, from personal care and grooming to household repairs and sports. These books can be checked out from the Amputee Coalition’s National Limb Loss Information Center (NLLIC) through interlibrary loans. You can also visit the NLLIC online (amputee-coalition.org/nlic_about.html) and search for other helpful resources.

Do It Yourself
People with limb loss and their families are also inventing their own adaptations for everyday living. If you can’t find what you need among the items above, you might decide to come up with your own solution like Vietnam vet Charles Collins, who lost his right leg below the knee in 1992 to vascular disease. He created zipper-leg trousers for himself, with the zipper on the inseam so he can doff and don his prosthesis without having to remove his pants.

Or you could follow Karl Ekstrom’s example. He made a cup holder for his wife’s wheelchair because he wasn’t able to find a suitable commercial product. “You buy a 4-inch PVC snap-in drain and notch it for the cup and to fit to the bar of the chair,” Ekstrom explains. “Use a 5-inch hose clamp to hold it in place on a bar of the arm rest.”

Also, UpperEx National Outreach Coalition provides a variety of resources and information for people with upper-limb loss/difference, including video tips (upperex.com/Tips.html).

Adapting to circumstance through native ingenuity and using readily available materials to develop aids for daily tasks are trademarks of human advancement. Living with limb loss may mean having to be more ingenious, but there is no limit to the spirit of human creativity.

Additional tips and ideas can be found online in previous Amputee Coalition articles, along with lists of companies and Web sites that feature aids for daily living, such as:

“Surviving in a Two-Handed World”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/jul_aug_01/world.html

“What Would MacGyver Do?”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/may_jun_04/macgyver.html

“Grooming, Bathing and Safety Tips”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/sep_oct_05/grooming.html

“Assistive Devices: Restoring the Comforts of Home”
amputee-coalition.org/senior_step/assistive_devices.html

“Accessible Kitchens”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/nov_dec_99/kitchens.html

“Adaptive Aids Increase Independence”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/oct_nov_97/adaptad.html

“Innovative Products Aid Daily Tasks”
amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/oct_nov_97/innovate.html