A discussion of adaptive aids and pointers to resources for adaptive aids for persons with upper extremity amputations

During the initial rehabilitation process, an individual with an arm amputation should learn about basic techniques and adaptive devices that promote independent function in such activities as self-care, homemaking, outdoor, vocational, and leisure skills. However, many of the best teachers are those who have learned by doing after an injury, inventing their own special equipment or techniques.

The following are examples of adaptive devices that encourage safe and independent living. Many are available from catalogs and specialty stores.

**Bathing**

Without a prosthesis, use wash mitts, pump bottle soap and shampoo; affix a back brush to the shower wall to scrub hard-to-reach areas; sew or pin towel corners to allow the arm to slip through and "hold."

**Personal Care**

With a prosthesis, use large-handed grooming tools (combs, brushes, toothbrushes, razors) or build-up handles with foam tubing for easier holding; use long-handed brushes or combs to increase reach. Without a prosthesis, place cuffs with velcro closures near the end of the arm to hold grooming tools, one-handed nail clippers, toothpaste dispensers, and suction brushes for dentures. Use aerosol spray adapters for deodorants or hairsprays. For toileting needs, try manual or automatic toilet tissue aids for better reach and hygiene.

**Dressing**

With a prosthesis, use button hooks and zipper pulls to fasten clothes, or add velcro closures; use elastic shoe laces or Spyrolaces instead of tying laces, or wear velcro closure or slip-on shoes; try sock starters for putting on socks.

**Eating**

With a prosthesis, if regular-sized utensils are difficult to control, use a 3-point hold for a hook terminal device and built-up handled utensils when wearing a hand terminal device. Without a prosthesis, a velcro cuff near the end of the arm helps hold utensils. Angled or longer-handed utensils increase reach; scoop dishes or plate guards assist in controlling food. Regular length or long straws and specialty cups are helpful for drinking. Crackers can be added to soups to thicken the consistency and decrease spilling.

**Homemaking**

For kitchen work, use cutting boards, one-handed jar and can openers, pan holders, jar tippers for pouring, tab openers, faucet and oven control turners; push carts are convenient for transporting foods. Use dycem no-slip pads for increasing hold.

**Access/Driving**

Install door levers or use doorknob turners, key turners, or loops made from cord placed around handles which are too small to grasp. For driving, use key turners, lever car door openers, steering wheel knobs or rings, and built-up dashboard knobs.
**Communication**

With or without a prosthesis, use a phone receiver holder or speaker phone; write with built-up handled pens or pencils or Velcro closure cuffs to hold a writing instrument.

**Vocational**

Apply extended arms onto drill or woodworking bases to support materials in use; adaptive terminal devices and tool holders facilitate tool use.

**Leisure**

There are variations of one-handed needle threaders, knitting needle holders, book holders, card holders and automatic card shufflers, as well as built-up handled gardening tools. Prosthetic terminal devices can be constructed for specific needs and activities such as photography, sports, and animal care. Fishing rod and golf club grips and pool cue holders are also available.

Rehabilitation is a lifelong process, and other amputees are frequently the best resources and problem solvers for mastering everyday tasks. Meanwhile, these and other items mentioned can help launch increasing independence, and enjoyment in daily living activities. Here are just a few suppliers and information resources that are available:

**Adaptive Equipment**

Sammons Preston 1-800-323-5547
North Coast Medical 1-800-235-7054
Smith & Nephew 1-800-558-8633
Sears Home Health Care 1-800-326-1750

**General Resources**

"Farming With an Upper Extremity Amputation" (Video), Breaking New Ground Resource Center, Purdue University, 1146 Agricultural & Biological Engineering Building, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1146, 1-800-825-4264

"The Use of Upper Extremity Prostheses" (Video), Art Heinze, OTR, 307 South Spruce Avenue, Thief River Falls, MN 56701

"The HANDbook: Information for New Upper Extremity Amputees, Their Families, and Friends", The Mutual Amputee Aid Foundation, PO Box 1200, Lomita, CA 90717-5200

"Therapeutic Recreation Services" (Sports activities), 1280 28th Street, Suite 3, Boulder, CO 80303-1797

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