

Clothing Adaptations and Dressing Aids for Independent Living

Every one of us has fumbled with a button. But stiffness, pain, weakness, or paralysis can make dressing and undressing particularly difficult. This information on types of clothing and simple adaptations, devices and methods to make dressing and undressing easier may be useful.

CHOOSE ACCESSIBLE CLOTHING

Roomy, stretchy clothes with simple fastenings are your best bet. For ease and comfort, choose clothing with:

- ✓ Side or front closings
- ✓ Deep armholes or raglan sleeves
- ✓ Pull-on, elasticized waists
- ✓ Ample ease to move freely
- ✓ “Breathable,” soft-surface fabrics

CLOTHING ADAPTATIONS

- ✓ Sew cuff buttons on with elastic thread; keep them buttoned all the time and simply slide your hand through.
- ✓ Remove buttons from the cuff or front of a blouse or shirt, and sew the button to the closed buttonhole borders. Sew Velcro on the two sides and press to close.
- ✓ Attach a ring or loop to the zipper tab so it’s easier to catch with fingers or a

dressing aid.

- ✓ Sew loops or tabs of ribbon or seam binding inside clothes to help in pulling them on or off.
- ✓ Adapt a brassiere by sewing up the back closure, cutting the front open, and attaching Velcro strips.
- ✓ To keep a shirt or blouse tucked in, sew rubber strips to the inside of your skirt or slacks waistband.
- ✓ Slacks can be fitted with side zippers in the legs for ease in pulling them on and off. Zippers in the inside seam to the knee may accommodate a cast or brace.

Remember: Buttons require the most movement and coordination; snaps or dome fasteners are easier. Zippers are faster and easier still, and simplest of all are Velcro strips.

SOME OTHER TIPS

Wheelchair-users should avoid long ties or scarves, full-length

coats, wide pant legs, or floppy sleeves, which can catch in wheel spokes or pick up dirt from the tires.

Wrap-around skirts are particularly fast and easy to put on, and allow women in wheelchairs extra movement. Choose a shawl rather than a sweater for extra warmth. Jackets with side (not rear) vents are less likely to ride up. Pre-tied, clip-on ties are available in attractive patterns for a dressier look. Avoid using pants pockets; keep your wallet in a breast pocket, secured with a strip of Velcro.

If you use crutches, a top with too much roominess can cause bunching or binding under the arms. On the other hand, tight shirts or blouses restrict arm and shoulder movement, leading to balance problems and split seams.

A customized apron of pockets designed for tools or items that you use most frequently may make work or hobby activities easier and more enjoyable.

OUTERWEAR

Look for warm, waterproof designs that can bridge seasons, with the same design features – deep armholes or raglan sleeves, roominess – as indoor clothing.

A hooded poncho or cape is particularly suitable for protecting a wheelchair user from rain and cold,

and can be purchased at camping supply stores. If you design your own, cut it just below waist level at the back and allow enough front length to drape over the knees. Taper the sides, so they won't bunch and catch in the wheels. A zip-in insulated lining can make a rain cape into a cold-weather garment.

A hat is essential in winter since so much body heat escapes from an uncovered head. A well-designed winter hat covers the ears, is made of a natural fiber with good insulating properties, and is not tight. If gloves are difficult for you to wear, try mittens instead. They're warmer, much easier to get on and off, and come in a wide variety of colors and styles. A thumbless version is especially warm and easy to get on and off, and can be knitted by a friend.

FOOTWEAR

Here are some ideas for accessible footwear:

- ✓ Both dressy and casual shoes are available in slip-on styles.
- ✓ Elastic shoelaces stay tied and simply stretch open when you put on or remove your shoes.



- ✓ Shoelace clips slide up and down

- the lace ends and lock into place.
- ✓ Many sport shoes and boots and a few dressier styles are available with Velcro tab fasteners.
 - ✓ A shoe button screws into the top lace hole on your shoe; once laces are tied, you just hook them over the button to fasten.

Inexpensive removable cleats attached to shoes or boots can improve your walking control on ice or snow. These can be purchased from a medical supply store.

DRESSING AIDS

When it comes to the actual process of dressing and undressing, dressing aids can make these activities easier.

A well-designed aid should be lightweight but sturdy, and will:

- ✓ Help you reach your clothing and pull it toward you;
- ✓ Hold the garment so that you can put in your foot, arm, etc.;
- ✓ Pull the article on without straining your back, shoulders or arms;
- ✓ Attach to and detach from clothing easily.

A very simple dressing aid can be made by attaching a clothes peg, hook, garter, or clamp to a piece of fabric tape, rope or length of wood. The rope or tape can be tied into loops for easier handling; two aids can be used together to pull on slacks, pantyhose, or a skirt. An instant dressing aid can be improvised from a wire coat hanger

by bending the triangular form into a long, thin handle; use the hook to reach, pull, or zip.



Button Hook / Zipper Pull

Sew small loops inside your clothes; catch them with the hook of your dressing aid to pull them toward you and to pull them on. Use belt loops on skirts or slacks, and buttonholes on shirts, blouses, and sweaters. If you own a reaching aid, you've probably already used it as a dressing aid. Most reachers have jaws or a projecting hook or lug for catching articles and retrieving them. You can find commercial dressing aids at most medical supply shops.

Once the garment is on, you'll need to fasten it. Buttons can be dealt with easily with a button hook, available in many sizes, with a variety of handles. Push the hook through the buttonhole, catch the button in the hook, and pull it through.

Attach a ring or loop to the zipper on slacks or jackets to make it easier to catch with your finger or the hook of a dressing stick. For back zippers, use a dressing stick if you can reach the zipper; otherwise attach a hook with a cord, (before putting on the garment, if you can't reach behind),

then grasp the cord or ring and pull the zipper.

SHOES AND BOOTS

A simple shoe horn can be your best friend when it comes to putting on shoes and boots, whether laced, buckled, or slip-on. Shop for a long-handled model to reduce bending and straining; check that the point where the horn joins the handle is sturdy, particularly if you use it for heavy shoes or boots. The handle can be built up if you find it hard or painful to grip. Push your shoe up against the wall or a solid piece of furniture for stability when putting it on. Removing shoes and boots can also be difficult, but a bootjack can be a great help. Place your heel between the prongs of the bootjack, and pull your foot out. A bootjack can be fastened to the floor in a convenient location or left free to be moved where needed. Or use the rung of a chair or stool to catch the heel when removing footwear.



Sock Aid

Vendors

AdaptAbility
P.O. Box 515
Colchester, CT 06415-0515
800/243-9232
www.adaptability.com

Ann Morris Enterprises, Inc.
551 Hosner Mountain Road
Stormville, NY 12582
800/454-3175
www.annmorris.com

Assisted Access, Inc.
P.O. Box 230
Lake Villa, IL 60046-0230
800/950-9655

Can-Do Products
200 Robbins Lane
Jericho, NY 11753
800/537-2118
www.independentliving.com

Clothes Ability
7170 Gershwin Court
Colorado Springs, CO 80911
719/390-1217

Dr. Leonard's Healthcare
100 Nixon Lane
P.O. Box 7821
Edison, NJ 08818
800/785-0880
www.drleonards.com

Dynamic Living
428 Hayden Station Road
Windsor, CT 06095-1302
888/940-0605
www.dynamic-living.com

Forde's Functional Fashions
225 S. Meramec, Suite 1029
St. Louis, MO 63105
800/531-7705
www.fordes.com

Gold Violin
P.O. Box 261639
San Diego, CA 92196
877/648-8465
www.goldviolin.com

Harriet Carter
Dept. 10
North Wales, PA 19455
800/377-7878
www.harrietcarter.com

Independent Living Aids, Inc.
27 E. Mall
Plainview, NY 11803
800/537-2118
www.independentliving.com

Maddak, Inc./Ableware
Pequannock, NJ 07440
201/628-7600

Maxi Aids
P.O. Box 3209
Farmingdale, NY 11735
800/522-6294
www.maxiaids.com

Pathways HomeCare Center
11091 E. Mississippi Ave.
Aurora, CO 80010
303/365-2100
www.pathwayshomecare.org

Rolli-Moden Designs
12225 World Trade Drive, Suite T
San Diego, CA 92128
800/707-2395
www.rolli-moden.com

Rolyan Ability One
P.O. Box 1005
N104 W13400 Donges Bay Road
Germantown, WI 43022
800/558-8633
www.rolyan.com

Sammons Preston
P.O. Box 5071
Bolingbrook, IL 60040-5071
800/323-5547
www.sammonspreston.com

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