Independent Living Aids for Personal Care and Grooming

We all feel better when we look good. If problems with weakness, coordination or paralysis make daily routines difficult, the bathroom is one room where modifications can really pay off. These are just a few of a wide variety of adaptations and devices to make personal care and grooming routines easier.

Dental Care

You can build up your toothbrush handle for easier gripping by adding a ready-made, built-up handle, a child’s bicycle handle grip, or a palm or wrist cuff. Foam tubing called Rubazote, available from medical suppliers, or foam curlers, have a hollow center to insert a handle into. Extension handles, of the type used with eating utensils, can be helpful when you can’t comfortably reach your mouth.

A denture brush can be attached to a sink or counter with a suction cup device. Flossing may be easier if you use a floss holder, available at most drug stores; it too can be fitted with a built-up handle. “Pump” style
toothpaste dispensers are easier for some people to manipulate. A twisting key is another possibility, while a third alternative is toothpowder, which you can simply dip a wet brush into.

Hair Care

The handle adaptations can be used to modify combs and brushes as well. Extension handles are particularly useful if arm or shoulder motion is limited, but your motions will lose some force due to loss of leverage. If you use a hair dryer, mount it on the wall to leave your hands free. The bracket should swivel so the dryer can blow in any direction. Hair washing is easiest in the shower; if you bathe in a tub, a hand sprayer is useful for rinsing. Pump dispensers or flip lids ease opening and closing shampoo and rinse bottles.

Skin Care

Liquid soap in a soap mitt eliminates fussing with slippery bars of soap and awkward facecloths. You can buy one inexpensively, or make a simple one yourself from a small amount of terrycloth.

Shaving

Electric razors are easier to use and safer than blades. A bracket or clamp can be rigged to hold a razor firmly to a counter or wall while you move your face against it. A Velcro strap holder can help secure the razor in your hand.

Nails

A nailbrush can be mounted on the edge of the counter or sink with suction cups. Attach a nail file or emery board to a piece of wood or tape it to the countertop to stabilize it for one-handed use. You can attach a nail clipper to a piece of plywood to give you better control, or increase the leverage by lengthening the handle. Larger clippers for trimming toe nails, available at most drug stores, may be easier to manipulate for fingernails.
Bath Aids

Safety is the first consideration. Safety treads or rubber mats on the bottom of tubs and showers are simple and inexpensive. Test and adjust water temperature before stepping into a bath or shower. Set water heaters below 120 degrees, and ask others not to run water elsewhere in the house to prevent temperature fluctuations. For extra protection, pressure balancers to prevent surges of hot or cold water are available from plumbing supply stores.

Handrails that clamp to the side of the bathtub and gripping bars for tub and shower walls can be purchased from medical suppliers.

Organize items that you’ll need before you get in the tub or shower. If you use a reaching aid, put it near the tub. A shelf across the tub keeps useful items near at hand and offers another surface to steady yourself against.

Bath brushes with long handles are useful for scrubbing various hard-to-reach places; handles can be built up or bent to improve your control.

Another way to scrub your back is to attach a piece of terry cloth, sponge, or loofah to a strip of sturdy fabric or plastic to pull from side to side. These scrubbers are available for sale at medical supply stores, but you can easily make your own.
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<td>Harriet Carter</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.harrietcarter.com">www.harrietcarter.com</a></td>
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<td>Independent Living Aids, Inc.</td>
<td>27 E. Mall, Plainview, NY 11803</td>
<td>800/537-2118</td>
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<td>800/468-4789</td>
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<td>Maxi-Aids</td>
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<td>800/522-6294</td>
<td><a href="http://www.maxiaids.com">www.maxiaids.com</a></td>
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Oshkosh, WI 54906  
702/617-3500  
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www.pathwayshomecare.org

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888/663-9396  
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OTHER RESOURCES

American Association of Retired Persons  
601 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20049  
www.aarp.org

American Society on Aging  
833 Market Street, Suite 511  
San Francisco, CA 94103-1824  
415/974-9600  
www.asaging.org

Amputees in Motion  
P.O. Box 2703  
Escondido, CA 92033  
619/454-9300  
www.faimonline.org

The Arc of the United States  
1010 Wayne Ave., Suite 650  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
301-565-3842  
www.thearc.org

Arthritis Foundation  
P.O. Box 7669  
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669  
404/872-7100  
www.arthritis.org

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970/248-0876 Main  
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www.assistivetechnologypartners.org
Brain Injury Association of America, 8201 Greensboro Dr., Suite 611, McLean, VA 22102
703/761-0750
www.biausa.org

Information Center for Individuals with Disabilities
Ft. Point Place, 27-43 Wormwood St.
Boston, MA 02210
617/727-5540
www.disability.net

Paralyzed Veterans of America
Information Specialist
801 18th St. NW
Washington, DC 20006
202/416-7710
www.pvaorg.com

Post-Polio Health International (PHI)
4207 Lindell Boulevard, #110
Saint Louis, Missouri 63108-2915 USA
314-534-0475
www.post-polio.org

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