

## What is Assistive Technology (AT)?

Assistive technology (often abbreviated as AT) is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

- AT can be low tech like communication boards made of cardboard or fuzzy felt.
- AT can be high tech such as special purpose computers.
- AT can be hardware such as prosthetics, attachment devices (mounting systems), and positioning devices.
- AT can be computer hardware, like special switches, keyboards, and pointing devices.
- AT can be computer software such as screen-readers or communication software.
- AT can be inclusive or specialized learning materials and curriculum aids.
- AT can be specialized curricular software.
- AT can be much more, including electronic devices, wheel chairs, walkers, braces, educational software, power lifts, pencil holders, eye-gaze, and head trackers.

Individuals needs vary based on disability so Assistive Technology needs have to be assessed in order to find the best possible fit. Assistive technology includes products and services to help people who have difficulty speaking, typing, writing, remembering, pointing, seeing, hearing, learning, walking, etc.

## How to get Assistive Technology?

Choosing AT is most often a decision that you make, together with a team of professionals and consultants.

The team is trained to match particular assistive technologies to specific needs so the person can function more independently. An AT team may include family doctors, regular and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, rehabilitation engineers, occupational therapists, and other specialists including consulting representatives from companies that manufacture assistive technology.

You can find out more about how various professionals can help you at the websites of their professional organizations including:

[AOTA](#) (American Occupational Therapy Association)

[ASHA](#) (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association)

[CEC](#) (Council for Exceptional Children)

[LDA](#) (Learning Disability Association of America)

[RESNA](#) (Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America)

## How is AT paid for?

There is no one answer to this question. It will depend upon the particular technology, its user, and its use. Many kinds of assistive technology may cost you little or nothing. Here are some examples:

- Schools systems pay for general special education learning materials as well as technology specified in an IEP.
- Government programs (whether Social Security, Veteran's benefits, or state Medicaid agencies) pay for certain assistive technology if it is prescribed by a doctor as a necessary medical device.
- Private health insurance pays for certain assistive technology if it is prescribed by a doctor as a necessary medical device or used for rehabilitation.

- Rehabilitation and job training programs, whether funded by government or private agencies, may pay for assistive technology and training to help people get a job.
- Employers may pay for assistive technology that is determined to be a reasonable accommodation, so an employee can perform essential job tasks.

In addition, almost all companies that sell assistive technology can give you more specific answers about funding opportunities for their products and may help you find financial support from these or other funding sources. Sometimes people have to use their own money for the assistive technology they think is important. But remember that persistence pays. Funding availability has changed over the years, and some technology that was not covered only a few years ago is now funded. Find the technology you need first – then look for the money.