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Help for Living: K-State expert says assistive devices are good at any age
Technology often includes options for simple tasks, Martinez says

MANHATTAN — The term, itself, seems to indicate something very high-tech, or exclusive to older adults or those with disabilities.

Assistive technology.

It is true, says K-State adult development and aging specialist Erin Martinez, that there are many devices available to assist people as they age – think of canes, prosthetics, wheelchairs, stair lifts, automated pill dispensers and more.

But for every high-tech option, there are numerous simple options for everyday living at any age, including eyeglasses, non-skid plates and bowls, motion control lighting, phones with large buttons and others.

"Assistive technology sounds complicated, but really it's not," Martinez said. "The typical definition is any tool or technology that helps a person complete daily tasks with ease and efficiency. It's those things that make our lives easier throughout the day."

Martinez cites an example of a step stool: "I have very capable physical mobility," she says, "but using a step stool to reach a higher shelf makes it easier for me and is a safer way to reach the upper shelf. That's something I use every day in my pantry."

She cites a lever handle to replace a traditional doorknob as another low-cost option that can be "an excellent use of assistive technology."

"When you have arthritis, a traditional rounded doorknob can be a lot more difficult to grasp and maintain that grasp in order to turn the knob in a comfortable way," Martinez said. "A lever handle is a horizontal bar that you can press down easily without having to focus on a more circular, tougher grip."

Martinez said K-State Research and Extension has an upcoming publication, Assistive Technology Basics, that lists some options for assistive devices in many parts of one's life:

• In the kitchen — Grip foam handles for silverware, cutting boards that hold food in place, a drinking straw holder and more.

• Around the house — Programmable thermostats, robot vacuums, grab bars and handrails and more.

• Dressing and bathing — Buttoning aids and zipper pulls, long shoehorns, one-handed belts and more.

• Communication — Pens and pencils with special grips, talk-to-text devices, electronic screen readers and more.

• Cognition and memory — Audiobooks, identification bracelets, note-taking systems and more.
• At work or on the farm — Ergonomic workstations, anti-fatigue mats, swivel seating and more.

"There are a lot of options, of course," Martinez said. "You can start by doing some online searching, or with our (K-State) publication and resources, and your local extension office is a great resource."

"We (K-State Research and Extension) have a lot of new assistive technology devices that you can try out, but you should also talk with your primary care physician and visit a home medical supply shop in your community."

Other resources include a physical therapist or occupational therapist. Many times, Martinez said, some financial assistance is available through insurance providers.

"One of the goals of assistive technology is to keep people in their homes longer and help them maintain independence and mobility, and maintain their overall emotional wellbeing and safety of being in their own home," Martinez said.

Martinez recently spoke on the topic during the Jan. 19 episode of Sound Living, a weekly podcast from K-State Research and Extension. The recorded program is available online.

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story


K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations

Sound Living (K-State Research and Extension), https://soundlivingksu.libsyn.com

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