



TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

for Adults with

Communication Impairments

One of the most difficult and emotional challenges for someone who experiences a traumatic brain injury, stroke, or a neurological disorder is temporarily or permanently losing the ability to speak.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) can offer practical solutions and new hope for adults who are dealing with an unexpected speech impairment.

AAC can help adults maintain



relationships with loved ones, advocate for themselves, take part in social and family activities, and achieve their highest level of independence and autonomy. AAC can be a vital communication lifeline at home, in the workplace, in social situations, and in medical settings.

This Guide can help you better understand what AAC is and how technology can possibly help an adult in your life who is having difficulty communicating.



How AAC Can Enhance the Quality of Life

There are a variety of reasons an adult may not be able to communicate. A stroke, traumatic brain injury, or a degenerative neurological disease like ALS can rob the individual of their ability to speak. This may be only for a short time. For example, individuals who have had a stroke may use a form of AAC while working to recover their ability to speak. Others may rely on AAC throughout the rest of their lives.

The goal of AAC is to provide a means of communication for individuals who are unable to speak using their natural voice. Regardless of whether the impairment is temporary or permanent, an AAC option should be provided.

How an AAC Device Works

AAC solutions for adults range from apps on tablets to durable medical equipment designed specifically for communication.

AAC devices range in size from small to large. They come with a language system, speech synthesizer, and accessories to facilitate accurate access to the device and to the computer if needed. Most language programs are spelling-based because adults often prefer to use what is most familiar. However, communication devices can offer a series of easy-to-learn strategies to speed up communication.

One of the key benefits of dedicated AAC devices is having multiple ways to access the technology. Flexible



access methods can be especially helpful for adults with physical limitations, especially if the condition is expected to change over time.

In addition to directly touching the screen, AAC devices also can be operated by:

- Eye-gaze technology that allows control simply by looking at the device;
- Head-tracking technology that allows control of a mouse through head movement;
- Switches that are activated by a hand, foot, or any body part that has the most reliable control.



Many modern AAC devices also go far beyond speech output to offer Internet access, phone and texting capabilities, and environmental control options. This type of technology can turn a speech device into a multifunctional system that allows one to communicate with people in a variety of ways.



Helping Adults Achieve Success with AAC

Adults who are unexpectedly dealing with the inability to speak are facing many challenges. Embracing a new and unfamiliar technology for communication can be difficult under such stressful circumstances.

Selecting the right device is essential. A speech-language pathologist who understands AAC can help with finding a communication system that is most appropriate to someone's needs.

Support from the family and others is critical to the successful use of any AAC strategy. Family members play a vital role in helping a loved one incorporate a new strategy into their lives so that they can be actively engaged with the family and in social and professional situations.

Once an adult begins using a device, ongoing support from a team of therapists and professionals with in-depth knowledge of AAC technology can help an individual maximize the value of the technology and adapt to new access methods for operating the device if their condition changes.



Facts about Funding

AAC speech-generating devices and support therapy services are often funded by Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance. There must be an evaluation provided by a licensed speech-language pathologist and a prescription from a doctor. Although funding sources will pay for a speech-generating device, they often will not purchase a device that is integrated or allows the device to function as a computer. You can work with the communication device manufacturer to add this feature.

What to Consider in Selecting an AAC Device

Here are some of the features to consider when helping an adult communicator select an AAC device:

- ✓ **Ease of use:** Adults want to quickly learn how to use the device. Look for a device that provides quick access to letters, words, and quick messages.
- ✓ **Flexible access options:** A device that offers multiple access methods can make communication possible even if the individual can't use his or her hands.
- ✓ **Portability:** You may want to consider a device that is designed for transporting but has the ability to adapt as an individual's needs change.
- ✓ **Screen size:** A larger screen with larger pictures and text can be very helpful, especially for adults who are using eye-gaze or head-tracking.
- ✓ **The ability to customize:** Look for a device that offers the ability to customize features and vocabulary, such as preprogramming family names, frequently visited places, favorite foods, and other commonly used words and phrases.
- ✓ **Web-enabled:** Many adults want a speech device with full computer functionality so they can access the Internet, text, email, and use social networking. Built-in WiFi™, Bluetooth® phone technology, cameras, USB, and other ports provide state-of-the-art ways to connect and communicate with people near and far.
- ✓ **Environmental controls:** When it becomes difficult to operate that small TV remote or to independently turn electrical appliances on or off, the communication device can be programmed as an alternate remote.
- ✓ **Bilingual vocabulary:** Some devices offer both English and Spanish vocabulary and voices.
- ✓ **Trial period:** It's always good to be able to try the device to see if it meets the individual's needs. Most companies have some form of a trial rental or loan.



Additional Resources for Adults with Acquired Communication Disorders

ALS Association

www.alsa.org

The ALS Association is leading the fight to treat and cure ALS through global research and nationwide advocacy while also empowering people with Lou Gehrig's Disease and their families to live fuller lives by providing them with compassionate care and support.

Brain Injury Association of America

www.biausa.org

BIAA's mission is to advance brain injury prevention, research, treatment, and education and to improve the quality of life for all people affected by brain injury. The organization is dedicated to increasing access to quality health care and raising awareness and understanding of brain injury.

National Stroke Association

www.stroke.org

NSA is the trusted source for free resources and education for the entire stroke community. The organization develops programs across the full continuum of stroke-prevention, acute treatment, and rehabilitation.

Explore AAC

www.exploreaac.com

Learn the basics about AAC: What it is, who uses it, AAC solutions, and more. A great resource for those wishing to learn more about AAC.



About PRC-Salttillo

PRC-Salttillo is the global leader in the development of AAC solutions, including augmentative communication devices, apps, computer access products, and other assistive technology for people with speech and language disorders.

Over fifty years ago, PRC-Salttillo pioneered the use of technology to bring speech and language capabilities to adults and children with disabilities. Since then, the company's products have enabled children and adults worldwide to achieve spontaneous, independent, and interactive communication regardless of their disability, literacy level, or motor skills.

In addition to powerful AAC devices, PRC-Salttillo provides teaching and implementation ideas, therapy materials, curriculum sequences, funding assistance, and training to speech-language pathologists, special educators, and the families of people who communicate with AAC.



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