

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY / EQUIPMENT HELP SHEET



This Help Sheet aims to present an overview of the role of Assistive Technology in enabling people with MJD to function as independently as possible and to participate as fully as possible in their family, community and social lives.

**Assistive Technology** is defined by The World Health Organisation (2012) as any piece of equipment, or product, whether it is acquired commercially, modified or customised, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Assistive technologies, when appropriate to the user and the user's environment, have a significant impact on the level of independence and participation which people with disabilities are able to achieve. They can reduce the need for formal support services as well as reduce the time and physical burden of caregivers.

## MJD and Assistive Technology

The impact of MJD on the musculoskeletal and vestibular systems is largely a result of the disease targeting the cerebellum which coordinates motor control, gait, balance, equilibrium and muscle tone.

People with MJD may benefit from a range of assistive technology over the course of the disease progression.

For example:

- **Home & community modifications** eg. grab rails, ramps, hoists.
- **Seating & positioning** eg. raised seats/chairs, specialised prescribed chairs.
- **Mobility aids** eg. walking aids, wheelchairs, scooters.
- **Communication/Socialisation** eg. Apple iPads & proloquo2go.
- **Aids for daily living** eg. handy bar for vehicle, kitchen aids, bathroom aids, continence aids,
- **Orthotics** eg. wide based shoes/sandals, customised splints.
- **Sensory aids** eg. reading glasses, glow in the dark products.

- **Recreation/therapeutic** eg. hydrotherapy equipment, exercise bike, pool hoist.
- **Personal safety/comfort** eg. Medialert bracelet, key holder, personal safety alarm.

Assistive technology cannot be generically prescribed. Prescribing appropriate equipment involves careful client specific assessment, consultation and decision making.

## Who Prescribes Assistive Technology?

Therapists involved in prescribing assistive technology:

- Occupational Therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Speech Pathologists
- Continence consultants
- Rehabilitation specialists

## Appropriate Client Specific Assistive Technology

When deciding upon appropriate assistive technology for a client, factors to consider include:

### 1. Client focus

- The client's involvement, acceptance & agreement.
- Physical, social and cultural environment.
- Training and support in getting used to the aid/equipment.

### 2. Carer focus

- Carer/family consultation and acceptance.

### 3. Training & Support

- All assistive technology requires training in use and/or adjustment in the presence of the client and carer.
- Training helps a smooth integration into the client's lifestyle.

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- Individualised or small group (eg. staff team) training is important for introducing, teaching and consolidating skills and techniques.
- The training period may highlight a need to modify the item.

## **Remember:**

- ❖ Improper use of any assistive technology may cause harm to the client or others.
- ❖ Be aware of the limitations of assistive technology and make sure you know both the purpose and the limits to what is used and how it is used.
- ❖ Discuss any issues, concerns, questions with appropriate professionals/therapists.

## **4. Potential Barriers**

- Physical, social and cultural environment.
- Access to repairs and/or regular maintenance support.
- Overloading client with too many items at once.
- Perceived stigma if the device draws attention to the person's 'disability'.

## **Remember:**

- ❖ Aim for assistive technology that does not emphasise a person's disability: personalise it in consultation with the therapist.
- ❖ People with MJD are readily fatigued and have visual disturbances as well as ataxia and mobility difficulties. Avoid overload and fatigue.

## **Device Selection Evaluation Criteria**

- **Performance:** effectiveness, reliability, durability, safety, comfort, transportability.
- **Ease of Use:** easy to set up, learn to use, operate, maintain, repair.

- **Aesthetics:** attractive, quiet, well-designed, does not 'look disabled'.
- **Cost:** purchase, maintenance, repairs.
- **Convenience:** easy to store and transport.
- **Flexibility:** compatibility with other devices, expandable.

## **Role of the Careworker/Direct Care Team**

Direct care staff work within the boundaries of their qualifications, role and organisational policies. You may be asked to contribute to an assessment meeting, or support someone with MJD to attend an assessment. You may be the person present when visiting therapists visit.

In knowing the person well in the care setting, you will:

- Maintain communication and connection with the person with MJD.
- Notice what works well and what does not work well in the care or social setting.
- Report changes or concerns to your supervisor and document as required, including request for therapist follow up.
- Participate in training for effective use of specific technology, aids, equipment.
- Work as a team to consistently follow assistive technology instructions/care plans.
- Communicate with therapists and MJDF staff as required and within your role.
- Be aware of health and safety considerations for staff and client, including awareness of relevant organisational policies.
- Provide feedback as is appropriate to your role.

## **Independent Living Centres Australia (ILCA)**

ILCA is a collective organisation with member organisations in each state and the ACT aiming to assist people to remain independent in their homes for as long as possible. They are a helpful source of ideas and present a

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wide range of products and devices available for use within a client's home or living environment.

[www.ilcaustralia.org.au](http://www.ilcaustralia.org.au)

ILCA Information Phone line (1300 885 886)

**Who can I talk to if I have questions or concerns?**

**MJD Foundation staff**

Phone: 1300-584-122

Email: [libby.massey@mjd.org.au](mailto:libby.massey@mjd.org.au)

Your Health clinic doctors, nurses and health workers.