

Mobility Management

By Trudie Mitschang



WHILE MOBILITY issues are often associated with aging, these difficulties can also be the result of many types of chronic illness. Mobility impairment refers to the inability to use one or more of a person's extremities. It may also involve a lack of muscle strength to walk, grasp or lift objects. Obviously, the inability to move freely and the subsequent loss of independence can have both a physical and emotional impact. The good news is, thanks to technology and innovations, a wealth of products are available to assist those who find themselves mobility-impaired.

Mobile technologies and apps can offer life-changing support for individuals with physical disabilities. Mobile devices can be used as remote controls for any number of gadgets, while wearable sensors can make it easy to summon help or track a person's location. Some apps and texting services can help users maintain medication regimens, and various hands-free devices, including smart keyboards and dictation apps, can help those with hand strength and dexterity issues.

Walking canes are designed to help people with mobility issues improve balance and walk safely. One innovation in the pipeline is the new Dring Smartcane (dring.io). The device debuted in France last year and features sensors that detect any unusual situation (fall detection, diminished activity, etc.). If that happens, the cane automatically alerts caregivers and family, without any action required by the user.

For a more low-tech solution, there are canes designed to meet very specific needs. Some offer adjustable features and can be customized based on height and left- or right-handedness. Others fold compactly for travel and come equipped with built-in LED lights. Many canes come in a rainbow of color options and with ergonomically-designed grips for added comfort.

A transport wheelchair is a mobility chair designed for convenience, short-distance use and easy handling by a caregiver. Some come equipped with rugged wheels for outdoor use, while others are specially designed for use in the bath or shower. Lightweight and foldable, these wheelchairs are easily moved and typically fit in the trunk of most vehicles. There is even a model designed to fold into a bag to be carried over the shoulder.

Travel scooters not only provide powered mobility, but also transportability. Many are compact, lightweight and can easily be disassembled into separate components to load into a vehicle. Four-wheeled models allow for enhanced stability on rough terrain, and an ergonomic delta tiller can provide increased usability for those with limited hand strength. For all models, consideration must be given to how long the scooter can operate on a single battery charge.

For those who have difficulty traversing household stairs, a stairlift could offer the ideal solution. The most recognizable type is the straight stairlift that attaches to the stair treads by way of a rail on which a chair can glide up and down. These lifts are suitable for those who can walk but not climb, and who don't need to transport anything up and down except themselves and small items that can be held on a lap. A variation would be a curved model that can be utilized with a winding staircase.

Those with a chronic illness do not need to let mobility issues prevent them from doing the things they love. Freedom in movement is possible with the right device. For help making the best device choice, consult with a physician or physical therapist who can offer recommendations. ■

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Take a Stand

The HurryCane all-terrain cane features a freestanding design and pivoting base for enhanced stability. The device adjusts to fit height and folds to store easily in a purse or beneath a chair. It supports up to 350 pounds. \$39.96; hurrycane.com



Style in Motion

The Rascal 8 Mobility Scooter from Windermere Motion is an easy-to-navigate model that has a 275-pound weight capacity and easily disassembles into six light-weight pieces. It features black, non-scuffing tires and a maximum speed of up to 4 mph. \$599; walgreens.com



Confident Climbing

The Easy Climber Stair Lift offers a custom-designed fit for either straight or curved and long or short staircases. The swivel design comes with foot and armrests to make getting in and out safe and easy.

Custom pricing; easyclimber.com

Shopping Guide to Mobility Products



Easy Transport

The Drive Aluminum Transport Chair folds down for easy storage and weighs just 19 pounds. It includes a seat belt for added safety, height adjustments and swing-away footrests. \$115; justwalkers.com



Improve Your App-titude

Phones can be updated with a number of popular apps for the mobility-impaired:

- **WheelMap** categorizes buildings and public spaces as fully accessible, partially accessible or not accessible for wheelchairs users.
- **WheelMate** lists whether toilets and parking spaces are wheelchair-accessible.
- **Uber** lets individuals choose a wheelchair-accessible “taxi” ride.
- **Tecla Access** enables users to control their devices, electric wheelchair and smart home through motions, eye blinks and puffing.

[Apple App](#) or [Google Play](#) stores