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# Top Tips: Parkinson's Disease – Tremors

## Do tremors ever make it difficult for your loved one to hold or use tools needed for grooming (soap/toothbrushes/shavers)?

There are many options available to make it easier to grip grooming tools. Here are a few tips:

### Using shaving equipment

If your loved one has shaky hands, he or she can place safety razors or electric shavers into a weighted holder that straps to their hand and helps your loved one to control hand placement with more steadiness.

**TIP:** Electric shavers are safer to use than a blade if your loved one's hands are not steady.

### Holding a toothbrush

Your loved one can place the handle of a regular toothbrush into round foam padding or use an electric toothbrush with an enlarged grip. This might counteract the affect of tremors though extended gripping time can increase tremors for some people. If your loved one cannot hold the toothbrush at all, place the handle into a universal holder that straps to the hand.

### Using toothpaste

If it is difficult for your loved one to squeeze the tube of toothpaste, place the tube into a dispenser that either requires him or her to turn a large turnkey or that dispenses with the downward pressure of just one hand to squeeze the tube. If your loved one can squeeze the tube but can't hold it steady to get the toothpaste onto the toothbrush, have him or her squeeze the paste directly into his or her mouth.

### Cleaning dentures

If your loved one has tremors in only one hand, he or she can use a denture brush that is held in place in the sink with suction cups. He or she will then use their steady hand to move the dentures over the brush. If your loved one can use their hands, but their grip is weak, place the denture brush into foam padding to increase the grip handle size for easier holding.

### Caring for nails

Try a clipper with larger handles that is easier to hold and requires less grip strength to use, or use a device that mounts the nail clipper and nail file in place. If your loved one has tremors in only one hand, attach a suction nail brush to the sink and move his or her hand over the brush to clean the nails.

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## Washing hands

If your loved one finds it hard to pick up a bar of soap, he or she can:

- Use a liquid soap pump dispenser and hand pressure to press down on the pump for soap.
- Use soap-on-a-rope hooked over the sink faucet to make it easy to scoop up and keep the soap from falling.
- Use an automatic soap dispenser that dispenses soap when their hand is placed under the sensor.

## Drying hands

If your loved one has trouble picking up a towel to dry his or her hands, install an electric hand dryer that will work with either a touch of a button or by just waving his or her hand in front of the sensor.

## Do tremors ever make it difficult for your loved one to do his or her hair care?

Here are some simple tips that can help if tremors make haircare difficult for your loved one.

### Use a different shampoo bottle or dispenser

If your loved one has trouble picking up the bottle, opening the cap, or squeezing the bottle, he or she can:

- Pour the shampoo into a smaller, non-breakable, lightweight bottle he or she can hold and squeeze easily.
- Pour the shampoo into a non-breakable, lightweight bottle that has a pump top. Then he or she just has to push down with the hand and not squeeze the bottle at all.
- If your loved one uses both a shampoo and conditioner, he or she should use a combination product to avoid having to deal with more than one bottle.
- Mount a shampoo dispenser at an easy-to-reach height. Then your loved one can just press a button to dispense the shampoo. There are also motion-sensor dispensers available.

### Use adapted styling tools

If tremors interfere with your loved one's ability to keep a firm grip, he or she can use combs and brushes with non-slip built-up handles. These tools can be bought with enlarged handles as well as with ergonomic grips with finger indentations. Or he or she can place the handle of his or her brush into a large foam cylinder to create an enlarged grip.

If your loved one cannot hold a brush or comb at all, he or she can slip a universal cuff or clip around their hand that is held in place with Velcro. The comb or brush is slipped into a pocket in the cuff to hold it in place without your loved one needing to grip it.

If it is hard for your loved one to push the top of a hair spray can due to tremors, he or she can place it into a can sprayer device and use his or her whole hand to squeeze a lever that dispenses the spray rather than having to use precision to push the sprayer.

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## Talk to the hairstylist

Your loved one can ask his or her hairstylist if he or she is using the right type of brush for the quickest and easiest hair styling. He or she might want to consider a shorter haircut that requires less work to style.

## Do tremors ever make it difficult for your loved one to close fasteners when getting dressed?

If your loved one has tremors, lining up small fasteners can be difficult. Here are some ways for him or her to avoid having to work small fasteners.

### Replace buttons with Velcro

- Replace the buttons with Velcro for simple press and pull closure.
- Sew the buttonhole shut then sew the button over the buttonhole to keep the look of a buttoned garment.
- The longer the piece of Velcro the greater the holding power, but keep in mind longer pieces can be more difficult to line up for a wrinkle-free closure.

**TIP:** Close the Velcro fastener prior to laundering so it does not snag or damage items.

### Use a buttonhook

Use a buttonhook if the button is too small for your loved one to place it in the buttonhole. The loop of the buttonhook slides from the front to the back through the buttonhole then slides over the button. As your loved one pulls the buttonhook back out of the buttonhole, the button is pulled through the buttonhole to button up the garment.

### Sew on buttons with elastic thread

Your loved one can use elastic thread to sew on buttons to avoid buttoning. The garment or sleeve is kept buttoned when putting on and taking it off. The elastic thread stretches to allow the opening to enlarge so your loved one's hand or head will go through the opening easily.

### Eliminate zippers

In general, wearing pants with elastic waistbands eliminates the need to fasten buttons, zippers, or snaps which can be difficult if you have tremors. Your loved one can also replace zippers with Velcro for press and pull opening. He or she should close the Velcro fastener prior to laundering so that the Velcro does not snag on other items and damage them.

### Use a zipper pull

Your loved one can use a zipper pull to help him or her grasp the zipper tab.

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## Use a zipper pull (continued)

- Attach the zipper pull to the zipper tab. Choose a size that will be easy for your loved one to grab.
- Or a large paperclip or keyring can be attached to a zipper tab and used to pull the zipper up and down.
- A zipper pull with a long cord attached can be used to pull up zippers on the back of a zippered dress.

## Choose the right bra style

Front fastening bras can be easier for your loved one to put on and take off compared to bras that fasten in the back. She can use a bra with no fasteners at all that is put on over the head and pulled down or over the feet and pulled up. Your loved one can also change the fasteners of her bra from hook and eyes to Velcro. Always close Velcro before laundering so that the Velcro does not snag on and damage other items.

## Do tremors ever make it difficult for your loved one to take his or her medications?

In general, to minimize the affect of tremors on the ability to do tasks requiring fine motor skills, your loved one should support his or her arm on a surface so that only the hand is moving while doing a task. Or your loved one can place a slip-on weight over his or her wrist as this may help to slow the tremor.

## Easily open blister packs

Your loved one can use a device to easily remove a pill from a blister pack:

- Place the device over and under a pill in a blister pack. Squeeze and the pill is pushed out into a holder.
- Your loved one can pierce the foil cover of the blister pack before trying to push the pills through with his or her fingers so that less force will be needed.
- If your loved one lacks the hand skills to get to get his or her pills from a blister pack even using an aid, ask the pharmacist to put his or her medicine in a pill bottle rather than a blister pack.

## Easily open medicine bottles

- If your loved one does not have young children around, ask his or her pharmacist to put the pills in a regular pill bottle rather than one with a child-resistant cap.
- Rather than using fingers to open a child-resistant top, your loved one can place the entire palm on it and then push down and turn the lid using arm strength rather than finger control.
- Your loved one can use a device to set over the cap that increases the size of the gripping surface and allows him or her to use less force to open the lid.
- Rather than keeping pills in the pill bottle, your loved one can use a pill organizer with daily slots so that, once the organizer is set up, he or she can just lift the hinged lid for the needed dose and tip the pills out. Your loved one should be sure all the other lids are sealed tightly before tipping the organzier so he or she does not spill all the pills.

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## **Easily remove pills from the container**

Tremors can make it difficult for your loved one to take just the right number of pills out of a pill bottle. Options to make this task easier include:

- If your loved one is able to open a blister pack, ask the pharmacist to provide your loved one's pills this way so that he or she can take the correct dose without having to get the pills out of individual bottles.
- Your loved one can use a pill organizer so that, once it is set up, he or she can just flip up the cap for the desired dose and then tip the pills into his or her hand or onto the table.
- Your loved one can put his or her pills into a special pill bottle that only shakes out one pill at a time each time the bottle is turned upside down.

## **Take liquid medicine**

If your loved one's tremor is not too severe, wearing a wrist weight might control the tremor enough to allow him or her to drink with more ease.

- Using a heavier, weighted glass or mug can help to provide some stability and minimize the amount of shaking.
- Your loved one can use lids on his or her glass or mug to prevent the contents from spilling or splashing out.
- Your loved one may want to only half fill his or her drinking glass or mug to help keep contents from spilling.

## **Is it ever difficult for your loved one to prepare his or her food?**

Tremors in the kitchen range from being a nuisance if your loved one were to spill to dangerous if he or she were to get cut. Your loved one should follow these tips for working safely in the kitchen.

### **Protect yourself when cutting**

Your loved one should wear a cut-resistant glove or finger guards while cutting or use a device to make cutting safer:

- He or she should use a curved tong with slots for a knife to steady round-shaped fruits and vegetables while cutting them.
- Your loved one could purchase a knife with an attached slicing guide to help steady the knife for slicing and control portion size.
- He or she can use a cheese board with a built in slicer.
- Your loved one can use a manual or electric chopper to cut food into small pieces.

### **Make measuring easier**

If tremors make it difficult for your loved one to hold his or her hand steady when measuring these tips can help.

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## **Make measuring easier (continued)**

- Your loved one can place a flat-bottomed measuring utensil on a cutting board to collect any overflow as he or she measures.
- Your loved one can use an automatic dispenser that releases a preset amount.
- He or she should keep his or her upper arm and elbow against their side to help keep the arm steady.

## **Hold bowls and pans in place**

If tremors make it difficult for your loved one to hold a bowl or pan steady while stirring:

- He or she can place a wet washcloth under the mixing bowl, to help steady it while stirring.
- Your loved one can place a piece of non-slip matting under his or her bowl.
- Your loved one can purchase a bowl holder that will both hold the bowl steady and also tip to allow easy emptying of the bowl's contents.
- Pan handle holders can be attached to your loved one's cooktop to hold handled saucepans steady as the pot's contents are stirred.

## **Is it ever difficult for your loved one to serve his or her food?**

### **Avoid lifting heavy pots**

When your loved one needs to fill pots with water, rather than placing the pot under the faucet, filling, then carrying the heavy pot, he or she should place the pot on the counter or burner and fill with a measuring cup or sink hose attachment.

### **Slide pots on countertop**

Lifting heavy pots and pans can be difficult as well as unsafe if the contents spill out due to tremors. Your loved one can eliminate the need to lift and move heavy pots and pans of liquid, mixing bowls, or hot casseroles by providing uninterrupted countertop work space so that heavy items can be slid rather than lifted to move along the counter.

- If there is a gap between your loved one's stove and countertop, buy a heat-resistant gap filler strip to fill in this space to allow pots to be easily slid between the cooktop and the countertop.
- If counter space to place hot items is lacking and your loved one has a 4-burner stove, deactivate 2 burners and place a wood cutting board or oven baking sheet/pan on the deactivated burners to create a space for placing hot items.

### **Safely move hot pots and casseroles**

If your loved one does have to lift and move a hot pot or casserole, he or she should:

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## **Safely move hot pots and casseroles (continued)**

- Cover the pot or casserole before moving.
- To help keep a pot steady, place at least one hand palm open under or around the item to help support its weight, being sure to use pot holders or oven mitts as needed.
- Purchase a tipper device that supports the weight of a kettle, pot, or bowl as it is poured to avoid having to hold a heavy item while pouring.

## **Safely remove hot food from oven**

It can be unsafe to take hot food out of the oven if your loved one is unsteady or has tremors. If this cannot be avoided, he or she should always pull the shelf out when putting food in, checking on it during cooking, or taking it out of the oven in order to keep his or her hands away from the walls of the oven. Your loved one should:

- Remove multiple oven shelves and just use the middle shelf to give him or her more working room when putting food into and taking it out of the oven.
- Use a push-pull stick to move the oven shelf out and in.

## **Serve hot food safely**

If your loved one's tremors make it unsafe to lift a heavy pot with hot food in it, avoid having to lift it by keeping it in place and removing just the food. Your loved one should:

- Place food in a strainer inside the pot so that only the strainer needs to be lifted and the hot liquid can be left in place until it cools.
- Use a slotted spoon, tongs, or a handheld skimmer/strainer to remove cooked food from the pot after cooking rather than lifting the entire pot to pour out the contents.
- Use a low-sided griddle rather than a skillet when cooking so that he or she can slide food off the griddle when cooked rather than lifting and tilting the skillet.

## **Is it ever difficult for your loved one to hold and use his or her utensils?**

Tremors can make it difficult for your loved one to hold and keep his or her utensil in the position needed to get food onto it.

### **Use built up handles or a utensil cuff to hold utensil**

Built-up handle utensils can be easier for your loved one to hold if his or her tremors make it difficult to keep a grip on the utensil handle. Handles come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and materials.

- Soft grips or ones with finger moldings are less likely to slip while your loved one is holding them.

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- Either your loved one can buy a utensil with a built-up handle or add foam tubing or a bicycle grip to his or her own utensils to build up their handles.
- Place a utensil cuff around your loved one's hand and then slide your loved one's spoon handle into the pocket on the cuff so that he or she does not have to hold the spoon with his or her fingers.

## Use adapted utensils

Utensils that are shaped differently can make them easier to use than standard utensils. Using a plate guard, raised-edge plate, or scoop plate or bowl can help keep food in place to better get it onto the utensil. Your loved one can:

- Use a combination spoon and fork – a "spork" – to keep him or her from having to change utensils.
- Use a utensil at right angles to the handle so that he or she can grip the handle with the entire hand and not just a few fingers. This can also help him or her to scoop food more easily onto the long edge of the utensil rather than from the small tip.
- Use a swivel spoon or Liftware spoon to help keep the utensil steady.

## Cut food with one hand

Having to use 2 hands together - one to hold the food in place and one to cut the food with a sawing motion - can be difficult if your loved one has tremors. He or she can use a rocker, roller, or right-angle knife for one-handed cutting rather than using a knife and fork. Your loved one needs to have a good grip to use these knives.

- With a rocker knife, your loved one simply rocks the curved blade with downward pressure to cut your food.
- A roller knife is just pushed forward through food so that your loved one does not need to use a sawing or rocking motion for cutting.
- Your loved one can use a knife at right angles to the handle so that he or she can grip with his or her entire hand and not just a few fingers. Then he or she can use a sawing or rocking motion rather than trying to hold the food steady with a fork while cutting.

## Protect the soft tissues around the mouth.

If your loved one's tremors are severe, he or she should use a plastic-coated spoon to protect his or her mouth's soft tissue and teeth. If it is hard for your loved one to control his or tremor as the utensil is placed in the mouth, he or she should use a spoon rather than a fork to protect lips, gums, and teeth.

**TIP:** Your loved one can avoid having to use utensils by eating finger foods that are polite to eat with his or her fingers such as sandwiches or chicken.



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## Is it ever difficult for your loved one to eat neatly?

Tremors can affect your loved one's ability to bring food and beverages to his or her mouth. Besides being messy, spilling while eating can affect nutrition if a lot of food that your loved one should be eating ends up on the table or his or her lap or the floor.

### Use weight

Heavier, weighted utensils, glasses, or mugs may help to minimize the amount of shaking tremors cause. If your loved one's tremor is not too severe, wearing a wrist weight while eating might control the tremor enough to allow him or her to eat with more ease.

### Use a plate guard

Your loved one can attach a plate guard around the rim of his or her plate to keep the food on the plate as he or she scoops. It gives your loved one an edge to push food up against.

### Use a scoop plate or bowl

If your loved one ends up pushing his or her food off the plate and onto the table or floor when he or she tries to get it onto their utensil, your loved one can use plates and bowls with a raised edge. Edge heights vary and can rise up to 1.5 inches. Look for other features that might be important to your loved one: latex-free, microwave, and dishwasher safe. Your loved one can:

- Use a plate with only one high side if he or she has limited range of motion in his or her hand and arm, holds the utensil in his or her fist, or must slide the utensil along the plate to scoop food.
- Use a plate with both sides high if he or she can hold the utensil with his or her fingertips and is able to tip the utensil down to the plate and back up with the food on it.
- Some scoop plates or bowls have sloped bottoms so that food collects in one spot making it easier for your loved one to scoop food onto the spoon.
- Use a partitioned plate.
- Partitioned scoop plates with each compartment having a high side for your loved one to push against with his or her spoon are available. This will help keep foods separated on the plate.

### Use an adapted utensil

Your loved one can use a swivel spoon, weighted utensil, or a LiftWare spoon to help keep the utensil level as he or she lifts it to his or her mouth.

### Avoid spilling liquids

- Use mugs with large handles or put a handle attachment on a glass to help him or her hold onto these items.
- Use cups, glasses, or sports bottles with built-in lids to keep the contents from spilling.
- Use a piece of plastic wrap with an edge folded back to create an opening for his or her lip.

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## Avoid spilling liquids (continued)

- Only half fill his or her drinking glass or mug to help keep contents from spilling.

## Use non-slip material under plates, bowls, and mugs

Your loved one can:

- Place dishes on non-slip material, such as Dycem, to keep tableware in place as he or she eats. Your loved one can buy precut mats in the desired size or a roll of non-slip material that can be cut to the needed size. He or she can also buy trays with a non-slip surface to keep dishes in place.
- Use plates, cups, or glasses with a non-slip bottom to help keep them in place on the table.

## Choose stable dishware

Your loved one can prevent dishware from being knocked over by choosing dishware with these features:

- Weighted dishes (bowls, cups, glasses/mugs, and utensils) to steady your loved one's dishware so that their tremor does not knock the plate out of place or on the ground.
- Suction-based plates or bowls to hold the dishes in place.
- Wide-bottom mugs to help provide extra stability.

**TIP:** If just a napkin is not enough to contain how much your loved one spills when eating or drinking, he or she can wear a stylish clothing protector. These protectors can be disposable, wiped clean, and/or easily laundered.

## Do tremors ever interfere with your loved one's ability to read?

Tremors may interfere with your loved one's ability to hold reading material steady. These ideas may help.

### Use a book or newspaper holder

If it is hard for your loved one to hold his or her book, magazine, or newspaper still because of tremors, a book or newspaper holder can help. Using a book holder will also keep his or her arms from tiring. These holders can be used on a tabletop or in bed. Or a floor-standing model with adjustable angles can be used anywhere in the home.

### Change the reading format

- Large-print books can be easier to read if tremors are causing constant movement.
- Your loved one can listen to audiobooks rather than having to hold his or her reading material.

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## Change the reading format (continued)

- If your loved one uses a computer, he or she can activate his or her computer's text to speech option to have news stories read aloud to him or her.

## Use an e-reader

E-readers or tablets can be smaller and lighter to hold than books so that your loved one's arms may not tire as quickly. And e-reader or tablet holders are available for bed or tabletop use or they can be floor-standing. Foot or large push-switch operated controls can be attached for ease of page turning.

## Use a page turner

If it is hard for your loved one to turn pages, he or she can use a page turner device such as:

- The eraser end of a pencil to flip the page.
- A device that wraps around the hand and has an attached bar with a rubber or tacky end to help with turning pages without having to hold the device.
- An electronic page turner if he or she is not able to use his or her hands at all.
- Foot or large push-switch operated controls for e-readers and tablets which can be attached for ease of page turning.

## Do tremors ever interfere with your loved one's ability to write?

Both tremors and a tendency to write very small can be problems with Parkinson's.

## Change the grip

If your loved one is having difficulty holding onto a pen or pencil due to tremors, he or she can:

- Try changing his or her grip style by placing the pen in the space between the index and middle or middle and ring fingers.
- Use a pen or pencil with a larger gripping surface to make it easier to hold.
- Attach an enlarged grip to the pen to help him or her hold it more easily and with less pain.

## Keep the pen steady

To reduce hand shaking while writing, your loved one can:

- Use a weighted pen or wrist weight to reduce shaking.
- Use a pen holder that includes a stable base that rests on the surface of the paper.
- Use a pen with a magnetic base or a magnetic wrist cuff on a metal writing surface.

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## Write bigger

- A pen with an added grip may help your loved one keep a more relaxed grip on the pen which might help decrease the amount of shaking.
- Your loved one can use lined paper and aim to reach the line above for upward pen strokes.
- Your loved one can use a typoscope writing frame placed over the area where he or she wants to write and use this as a guide for letter size.
- Encourage your loved one to concentrate as he or she writes, not rush, and focus on each letter as it is written. This can help him or her write more legibly.

## Use a different method

- If these tips do not make your loved one's writing more legible, he or she might want to use computer voice recognition software to write on the computer using a word processor.
- If writing has become severely comprised, he or she should contact his or her bank and ask what procedures need to be followed for banking transactions that require his or her signature.

## Do tremors ever make it more difficult for your loved one to use the computer keyboard or mouse?

### Change computer keyboard settings

Many of these features can be found by going to your loved one's computer Control Panel or Settings and clicking on either Ease of Access or Accessibility.

- Activate Sticky Keys if tremors prevent your loved one from holding down multiple keys at the same time. Sticky Keys allows him or her to press the needed keys in a sequence one at a time rather than having to press them all at the same time.
- Activate Filter Keys if your loved one's hand tremors are causing repeat keystrokes. The Filter Keys setting tells the computer to not keep repeating a letter if a key is held down for too long.

### Use an adapted keyboard

There are products that can help make the keyboard easier to use. If keyboarding is too difficult for your loved one even with an adapted keyboard, he or she can use voice recognition software to speak what they want to write and have the program convert this to written text.

- A keyguard can be attached to the keyboard so that your loved one's finger has to enter a slot to press only one key at a time preventing a shaky hand from hitting multiple keys.
- A larger keyboard with bigger spacing between the keys may make it easier to type on the keyboard without your loved one hitting multiple keys at once.

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## Change computer mouse settings

Ideas that may be already be installed on your loved one's computer to help him or her use the mouse more easily:

- Activate Mouse Keys to turn the numeric keypad into cursor movers if tremors make mouse control difficult. If Parkinson's causes slowed movements, adjust the Mouse Double-Click Speed to make it respond slower (see Control Panel or Settings: Mouse option).
- Adjust the Mouse Pointer or Tracking Speed to help if your loved one is having trouble controlling smooth mouse movements.

## Change how you use the mouse

Your loved one should:

- Use a light grip as muscle fatigue can increase tremors.
- Support his or her arm and wrist on the chair's armrest or the surface of the desk to provide stability.
- Try using arm or wrist weights as this may minimize the effect of tremors.

## Use an adapted mouse

Products that might help make the mouse easier to use include a:

- Trackball that operates by rolling the ball on top rather than moving a mouse on the desk.
- Joystick which is pushed or pulled while your loved one's arm and wrist stay in contact with the desk for extra stability.
- Foot-controlled mouse so your loved one's hand tremors cannot interfere at all.

## Do tremors ever make it difficult for your loved one to use his or her phone or cellphone?

### Hold the phone

Parkinson's tremors can make it difficult for your loved one to reach out and grab the handset. In addition, holding the handset to his or her ear for an extended period of time can increase tremors.

### Add a holder

Put a holder on the telephone handset that allows your loved one to slip the holder over his or her hand to hold the handset rather than gripping the handset with his or her fingers.

### Don't hold it

To avoid having to lift and/or hold the telephone handset or cellphone, your loved one can:

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## Don't hold it (continued)

- Use a telephone headset with a microphone so that he or she does not have to hold the phone at all.
- Purchase a phone or cellphone with a speakerphone option.
- Purchase a handset lifter that allows a phone with a speakerphone to be answered with a touch of a button.
- Position his or her cellphone or phone handset in a gooseneck holder and use the speaker function on the phone to talk without having to hold the phone.

## Choose an easy to use keypad

Look for a keypad with large numbers with space between the buttons or one that has recessed keys. If the phone has a redial or speed dial option, be sure that it is not located too close to the number buttons.

## Choose helpful phone features

- Use preprogrammed frequently called numbers for one-touch dialing including emergency numbers.
- Use the redial button on his or her phone for repeat dialing of a number.
- Use a smartphone which responds to voice commands.

## Avoid dialing the phone

- Use a phone with a pendant that, with a touch of a button, remotely dials and answers so that he or she does not have to dial or even lift and hold the handset.
- Use a voice-activated phone dialer to call preprogrammed phone numbers.
- Use a cellphone service that has operator-assisted dialing.

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