

Helpful Hints

By: Janice Matthews

After being in a wheelchair for 6 years from a massive stroke, I have come across some hints for wheelchair-confined individuals with one paralyzed side.

- *My occupational therapist taught me to pull up the sleeve on the affected arm just past the elbow. I have found, for me, is I more effective using my other hand, flattened against my side, against the shirt, and up to the armpit. The shirt will then go down in back. Getting it just over the elbow does not allow the shirt to go down as easily. This is also the method I developed for warmer weather (for short-sleeved shirts), however it is really more necessary for longer sleeves.*
- *With only one hand and needing a brace & shoe on my affected leg at all times, I must dress with the shoe already in place over the brace; I am not currently able to remove the shoe and brace, and then get it back on with one hand.*
- *For putting on slacks, I have found that by pulling a plastic grocery sack over the shoe first, the leg of the slacks on the affected side slides right over the shoe first, allowing the pant leg to slide over both the brace & shoe at one time.*
- *For carrying small items in the wheelchair, my cousin designed & stitched a "carry-all" using a standard hand towel, sewing "pockets" by running several seams vertically in the towel, forming pockets. These pockets are approximately 4 inches wide.*
- *First, fold up the towel at the bottom as deep as one wants the pocket, leaving enough loose material at the top to go over the arm of the chair. Run seams vertically to form the separate pockets. Self-adhesive squares can then be sewn on a couple of places across the top, so that the towel can attach over the arm of the wheelchair on the "good" side. I carry miscellaneous items including my hone, ink pen and emery board in my "towel" bag. It is easily laundered and*

reattached (using the adhesive squares) over the arm of the chair. It is an inexpensive, practical little carry-all.

- *For picking up small items that have fallen on the floor, I have found a 6-inch pair of 99-cent scissors, which I also have in the carry-all, allows me to easily grab and pick up small items the reacher doesn't handle, such as safety pins, beads, jewelry, paper, ink pens, etc. by using the point of the scissors. For larger items or clothes, I use a long-handled shoehorn to "scoop" up the items. I have never found a drink-holder for soda cans or water bottles, but the carry-all works for that as well because of the "separate" pockets in the towel.*
- *In the kitchen I find BBQ utensils (spatula or tongs) allow me to reach high enough to open kitchen cabinets etc. The flat design of the spatula fits under the lower edge of the door, which enable one to open the door from the wheelchair. My 2 sons are caregivers and are both 6 ft. tall so things are generally stored too high for me to reach. The standard "reacher" isn't as long or stable as the bbq tools, and is usually in a different room, so I successfully use BBQ tools for reaching kitchen items. Also in the kitchen, it is much easier to wash dishes from a wheelchair with a long-handled vegetable brush (my friend picked up one for me at the local "dollar" store.) It is nice to use to keep from getting the sleeves wet while reaching into the soapy water in the sink.*

It's a feeling of accomplishment to be able to do some simple tasks for one's self. After 6 years, I still do not have use of the affected hand & arm, but I am hopeful that may change someday.

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