

## Personal Digital Assistants

If you don't already use one, it might be time to invest in a personal digital assistant (PDA). Also known as a handheld or palmtop, a PDA is a small, lightweight computer used as a personal organizer with communication capabilities. Many therapists at Rainbow work with clients who use PDAs. These devices help brain injury survivors to remember schedules and medications, and are very convenient to use.

People don't often think of a handheld device as a potential tool for those with disabilities. For many, they appear to be complicated and difficult to manipulate. How can a device so small be practical? The truth is that handhelds are an excellent tool for individuals with disabilities. The size of the device is an advantage rather than a disadvantage, especially when portability, price and convenience are considered.

A PDA allows you to efficiently access, organize, collect, store and process various kinds of information. Depending on the user's need, PDAs can act as a word processor, spreadsheet, calendar, address book, appointment scheduler and wireless communicator for sending and receiving data and e-mail. PDAs can also talk directly to each other via infrared signals. The process is called "beaming," which eliminates the need to type.

Newer PDAs have both color screens and audio capabilities, enabling them to be used as mobile phones, web browsers or portable media players. One of the newest introductions to the market, the iPhone by Apple, can be utilized additionally as a handheld GPS system.

If an individual has difficulty writing, a portable keyboard can easily be used as an input device. Keyboards for handhelds fold up neatly and are almost as small as the PDAs. Touch pads are a great option for those with unsteady hands. According to Don Daniels, a Rainbow Vocational Specialist, "The ability to use a touch screen is great for our clients. If they have an unsteady hand, the touch screen is very forgiving and easy to use."

Software that recognizes handwritten input drawn on the display screen is available for a variety of PDA brands, eliminating the need to type on keypad or touch screen. Voice recognition software and digital voice recorders are another option when audio input is preferred.

With schedules and "to do" lists available at the touch of the screen, individuals with brain injuries often feel more confident when using a PDA. Instead of relying on memory, what they need



to know is quickly available at their fingertips — They don't have to worry about being embarrassed because they can't remember what they need to do next.

If PDA technology is new to you, research on the Internet is fairly easy. Several sites have reviews and reports on purchasing PDAs, including [www.pcmag.com](http://www.pcmag.com) and [www.consumerreports.org](http://www.consumerreports.org).

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