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AT for Mental Health Accommodations

Priest and Bones (2012) found that occupational therapists (OTs) working in vocational rehabilitation play a key role in assisting individuals with mental health impairments gain employment. Most commonly, OTs in vocational rehabilitation help their clients reach these goals through the use of assistive technology (AT). Relatedly, Devlin, Nolan, and Turner (2019) found that AT has been identified as a valuable tool to be recommended by health care professionals to individuals in need of mental health accommodations. Arthanat, Lesner, and Sundar (2016) concurred, finding that employees rated themselves as being more successful and productive with the use of AT devices in the workplace.

If you feel your mental health is affecting your ability to find or maintain employment, please consider applying for services with the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services at www.vadars.org. If you would like more information on apps which can support mental health, please view Georgia Tech's "Tools for Life" resource at <https://gatfl.gatech.edu/favorite-search.php>. For further information on job accommodations in the workplace please visit <https://askjan.org> or <https://www.resna.org> to find a certified AT specialist.. For more information on low interest loans on assistive technology, please visit <https://www.atlfa.org>.

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1. Apps to Aid Anxiety and Self-regulation

- Although there are many different ways to approach anxiety management and self-regulation, various apps have been developed in the aim to aid individuals in need of this type of mental health accommodation. Popular apps for anxiety and self-regulations aid are listed below. For more informations on apps for mental health accommodations please visit <https://gatfl.gatech.edu/favorite-search.php>
- Self-help Anxiety Management
- Breathe2Relax
- Calm Counter
- Daylio (journaling)
- Headspace (offers a free 10 day trial)
- I Can Be Anything
- MoodTrack Diary
- Stop, Breath, Think (an Alexa skill)
- MyLife Meditation
- MyLife Meditation
- Colorfy
- Bubble pop
- Pause (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LM-yIIELPg>)
- Calm
- Insight Timer
- Multitimer
- Balance
- Stoic. Daily self-care journal
- Self regulation tool - <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/1433866340199825411>

2. Electronic Self-regulation Aids

- Devlin, Nolan and Turner (2019) studied tools that can support self-management for people living with schizophrenia and found that AT was a valuable tool to provide individuals mental health accommodations. There are multiple examples of AT devices for all varieties of mental health accommodations but for this resource examples of these aids have been grouped into Organization, Tactile, Visual, Auditory Aid categories listed below.
 - a. Organization Aids
 - the Revibe (can provide reminders such as meditation or taking medication, deep breathing, etc) (<https://revibetech.com/pages/revibe-connect>)
 - the Motivaider (<https://habitchange.com>) (<https://youtu.be/yMmhEJZj-mo>) (<https://youtu.be/DV4VBaRRspA>)
 - smartwatches such as the Apple Watch or Garmin watches (<https://youtu.be/Njb0zU6Fm0M>)
 - Fitness trackers such as FitBits
 - Please see the Cognitive Resource for more information

b. Sensory Aids

- Heated and/or weighted blankets (www.sensorygoods.com/)
- Robotic cat companion (https://joyforall.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA7NKBhDBARIsAHbXC-B4HkQBzNhlhNi_FC6-Xy3spD7e1nKvJdL7FEWjL2pI9kxexG-0dWDsaArzbEALw_wcB&gclid=Cj0KCQiA7NKBhDBARIsAHbXCB4HkQBzNhlhNi_FC6-Xy3spD7e1nKvJdL7FEWjL2pI9kxexG-0dWDsaArzbEALw_wcB) or artificial fish tank
- Vibrating items such as pillows (<https://www.amazon.com/FLAGHOUSE-3466AMZ-Vibrating-Pillow/dp/B009QV0LG2>)
- Vibrating toothbrushes



c. Visual Aids

- Virtual reality headsets. According to Whitney (2016), “the use of virtual reality and video games is increasingly prevalent in rehabilitation, and occupational therapy practitioners are taking advantage of the unprecedented array of opportunities available to clients in the virtual context.” (p. 2). Other items such as wifi enabled picture frames (https://www.amazon.com/Dragon-Touch-Digital-Picture-Auto-Rotate/dp/B0815ZZ29C/ref=sr_1_3?c=ts&dchild=1&keywords=Digital+Picture+Frames&qid=1615384572&refinements=p_n_feature_fi_browse-bin%3A1254716011&s=photo&sr=1-3&ts_id=525460) or a Facebook Portal (https://www.amazon.com/Facebook-Portal-Calling-Screen-Display/dp/B07XWKQYT/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&gclid=Cj0KC

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391571568194&hydadcr=18005_11412178&keywords=facebook
+portal&qid=1615904775&sr=8-2) may also be helpful.



d. Audible Aids

- White noise machines (<https://www.amazon.com/Portable-Relaxing-Soothing-Charging-Auto-Off/dp/B00A2JBMRE>).
- Fans
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Alerts and Timers on digital devices

- There are also songs and sounds that can aid anxiety management such as the song Weightless by Marconi Union (<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=eQ6-TNre9k&list=RDAMVMeQ6--TNre9>) or ChilledCow's playlists/ live streams (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSJ4gkVC6NrvII8umztf0Ow>).

3. Non-Electronic Self-regulation Aids

- There are also numerous nonelectronic aids available for individuals seeking mental health accommodations. These may come in the form of workstation accommodations or home accommodations. Examples of these aids have been grouped into Tactile, Visual, Auditory and Taste and Smell Aid categories below:
 - a. Sensory Aids
 - Weighted vests (see in the middle picture below)

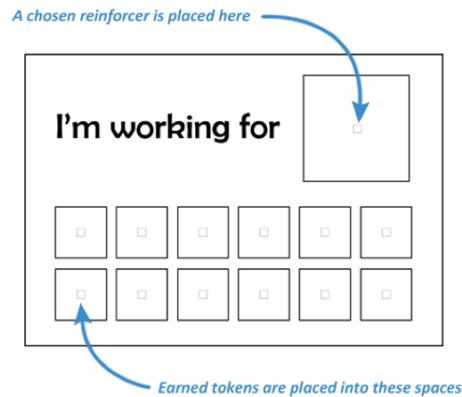
- Wiggle seat cushions or bosu balls (https://www.amazon.com/Body-Sport-ZZRVDBL-BodySport-Balance/dp/B00CV4X6PY/ref=asc_df_B00CV4X6PY/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=194945998049&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=12119817825021401777&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9008139&hvtargid=pla-316259129675&psc=1)
- Fidget spinners (<https://www.google.com/search?q=spinner>)
- Snapping rubber bands (see picture on left below)
- Soft and cozy items
- Calm Strips (www.calmstrips.net)
- Yoga mats
- Spiky balls (see picture on right below)



b. Visual Aids

- Visual schedules
- Visual reward systems
- An hourglass
- Crafting supplies such as paints or coloring books
- TheraSpecs (<https://www.theraspecs.com>)
- Black Out stickers for lights on electronic devices (https://www.amazon.com/LightDims-Black-Out-Electronics-Appliances/dp/B00CLVQG68/ref=asc_df_B00CLVQG68/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=242027088707&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=4551634844092556397&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9008139&hvtargid=pla-477430934047&psc=1)

- Filters for fluorescent lights (https://www.amazon.com/Educational-Insights-1232-Fluorescent-Filters-2-Pack/dp/B00HT5H8Z4/ref=asc_df_B00HT5H8Z4/?tag=hypod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=167123281189&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=7261695239608022411&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9008139&hvtargid=pla-275713107318&psc=1)



c. Auditory Aids

- Alerts
- Timers
- Calming music <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qap5aO4i9A>
- Noise-canceling headphones or earplugs
(<https://www.hearos.com/collections/all-consumer/products/earplugs-high-fidelity-series-with-free-case>)

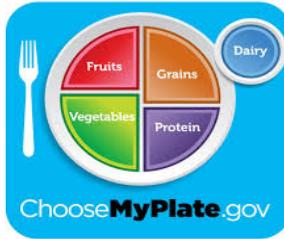


d. Smell and Taste Aids

- Candy or sour foods
- Essential oil diffusers (can be electronic or non-electronic)
- Candles
- Perfumes or room sprays

4. Establishing Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

- Establishing coping mechanisms and strategies is also an important aspect of providing support to individuals seeking mental health accommodations. Establishing a healthy daily routine and habits lays the groundwork of getting enough sleep and consequently having enough energy to be able to accomplish everyday tasks and succeed in our roles, whether that's at home or in the workplace. It also helps us regulate our emotions and our bodily responses to stimuli in a more positive or desired manner. Please <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HENohs6yYw> for a general example. Key factors in establishing good coping mechanisms and strategies include:
 - Establishing a healthy sleep/wake routine
(<http://www.sleepwithmepodcast.com>) - Sleep buds
(https://www.bose.com/en_us/products/wellness/noise_masking_sleebuds/noise-masking-sleebuds-ii.html#v=noise_masking_sleebuds_ii_white) may be helpful for some individuals
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkswdqpHqww>
 - Utilizing the STOP method (<https://cogbtherapy.com/mindfulness-meditation-blog/mindfulness-stop-skill>)
 - Positive self-talk or affirmations
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZssjZnsN4Gg>
 - Exercise
(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYqR7WkL8i1b6xtSssDmW9w>)
 - Yoga https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTANio_2E0Q
 - Incorporating movement throughout the day
(<https://www.ryerson.ca/recreation/programs/movement-breaks/movement-break-0-3/>)
 - Meditation or prayer
 - Deep breathing exercises
 - Self-care such as taking a bubble bath
 - Eating a balanced diet
 - Setting goals (aim high but be realistic!)



5. Participation Aids

- AT for participation aids are one of the most varying in nature due to the wide array of options, environments needed, and preferences of the individuals seeking these aids. However, this also makes AT participation aids one of the most popular types of aids due to the increase in independence and ultimately in everyday activities that they can provide. Ripat and Woodgate (2017) found that employers should recognize AT as essential to an individual's engagement with their job duties and that they have an important role in developing inclusive work environments. Additionally, they found that often due to the lack of experience and comfort in professional settings, young adults in particular need to ensure that their needs are met in productivity-related environments. AT participation aids can range from the use of apps such as Calm (which could be used for anxiety) to adjustable bedside tables for computer access (which could be used for depression) depending on what type of mental health accommodations an individual is seeking. For more information on participation aids please see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SaWrwvFEW16jJ4Z9zMD-cYibtE-SPLdQ/view?ts=60469c3a> or contact an OT who specializes in sensory processing.

Case Study Example:

Alex is a 31-year-old female who has a history of post-traumatic stress disorder and was diagnosed with major depression and generalized anxiety disorder in high school. Alex works in retail at a large department store and lives alone in a busy and noisy apartment building. Since the start of the pandemic, she has had more difficulty managing her mental health symptoms and it has been affecting how she sleeps at night. Her lack of sleep has consequently been making her late and missing work shifts. Wanting to maintain her employment, Alex contacted DARS to meet with an occupational therapist who specializes in assistive technology to assist her. The occupational therapist evaluated her needs through the use of a standardized sensory processing assessment to further identify her sensory needs. Based on the results of the assessment of Alex's sensory needs and her history of trauma, the occupational therapist recommended the provision of a robotic cat or dog and a weighted blanket to lend Alex a sense of comfort and companionship during the night to provide her the proprioceptive and sensory input the assessment indicated she would benefit from. The occupational therapist considered recommending Alex acquire a live animal to meet her needs, however, Alex reported that was not able to afford the food or care the animal would require and it was determined that the robotic animal would better aid her to manage her depression and anxiety. Additionally, the occupational therapist discussed with her how to implement healthy habits such as good sleep hygiene, nutrition, and exercise in her daily routine to support stress and anxiety management. Alex reports she has been sleeping much better with her robotic cat, "Mr. Mittens", and has been successful with the implementation of her healthy habits. Since making these changes, Alex has not been late or missed a work shift.

References

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