

Fall/Winter 2016

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Sensory friendly events and performances help make the holidays memorable for everyone!

## Sensory Friendly Holiday Happenings

Many families have special traditions during the winter holidays like visiting Santa or going to the theatre. For individuals with autism and others who are sensitive to stimuli such as light and sound, experiences like these can shift from enjoyable to stressful.

Many dance companies around the country are beginning to offer sensory-friendly performances of shows such as A Christmas Carol and the Nutcracker. During these performances, theaters make efforts to create a relaxed, supportive environment for show-goers and their families. Modifications include lower sound levels, elimination of harsh or startling lighting and special effects, and dimmed house lights throughout the performance.

Additionally, the traditional "house rules" of theater performances are relaxed; guests are free to get up and move around, and there is no expectation that the audience be completely silent. Theaters also offer quiet areas and activity areas in the lobby for taking a break. Sensory toys and fidget objects, and ear plugs, are also available. In the western Pennsylvania area, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater will offer a sensory-friendly performance of the Nutcracker this holiday season, as they have in years past. More information can be found at <http://pbt.org/sensory-friendly-performances>.

Similarly, the tradition of visiting Santa at the local mall is now more accessible to many individuals with sensory sensitivities and their families across the country. Many malls have begun offering sensory-friendly photo sessions with Santa, before the malls open to the public, to give individuals an opportunity to meet Santa in a less stimulating environment. In western Pennsylvania, the Monroeville Mall, Westmoreland Mall, Ross Park Mall, and South Hills Village have teamed up with the Autism Connection of PA to offer sensory-friendly sessions with Santa this year.

Visit <http://www.aboard.memberlodge.com/page-260524> for more information or to register. A list of other malls across the country that offer similar Santa sessions can be found here: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/caring-santa>.

The holidays are a time to make memories, and sensory-friendly options such as these make it easier and more enjoyable for everyone!

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## Yes Chef! App for Cooking

With the winter holidays are around the corner, many of us will be busy preparing elaborate meals and baking festive treats. For some individuals with disabilities, cooking can present some challenges. People with vision loss or reading disabilities, for instance, may find it difficult or impossible to read a recipe. Individuals with memory loss or other cognitive disabilities may have trouble following a recipe's steps.

Yes Chef is an app that aims to eliminate these barriers in the kitchen, and make cooking more accessible and enjoyable. Created by Pittsburgh-based Conversant Labs, this free app for iOS devices is a hands-free solution that allows users to find recipes, hear the recipes out loud, and use their voice to ask questions.

According to Conversant Labs, Yes Chef can answer questions like:

"Chef, how do I make Ratatouille?"

"Chef, what temperature do I set the oven to?"

"Chef, what's the next step?"

"Chef, is it baking powder or baking soda?"

"From prep to plate, Yes Chef is entirely hands free. With the knife in one hand, all you have to say is, 'Chef, let's get started.' If you're cooking chili from scratch, Yes Chef may say 'Dice the tomatoes.' Once you finish dicing tomatoes, simply say 'next step' and the app continues to read the recipe aloud...If you don't understand a step in the recipe, you can ask follow up questions, and because the app is hands free, it won't matter how grimy your fingers are."

Visit <http://www.conversantlabs.com/yeschef> for more information.

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## Holiday Shopping Guide: Stocking Stuffers That Are Easy on the Joints

When people hear the words "assistive technology," they often assume that such tools and devices are expensive. But there are many products that are designed to help individuals with disabilities perform certain tasks more easily, and at an affordable cost.

If you're looking for low-cost stocking stuffers for people with arthritis, limited mobility, or joint pain or weakness, the following list features helpful products that each costs less than \$15.

The Telestik portable reacher (starting at \$14.99) is handy for those who have difficulty bending or reaching. It collapses small enough to fit into a purse or briefcase and features a hook with a magnetic tip to easily pick up metal objects.

A variety of inexpensive products for handwriting are available. The Ring Pen (\$10.95), for instance, has a unique shape to reduce pain while writing. Similarly, the PenAgain ErgoSof Pen (\$4.75) is ergonomically designed to fit the natural contour of the hand. The HealthSmart Grip Write Pen (\$3.99) features an easy-to-grip ball



*The Yes Chef smartphone app is a hands-free cooking assistant.*



*Telestick portable reacher tool.*



*PenAgain ErgoSof pen.*



HealthSmart Grip Write pen.



Hole in One key holder.

shape for those with hand pain or weakness.

The Hole-In-One key holder/turner (\$6.95) has space to hold up to 2 keys at any angle. The large handle design allows users to grip it more easily, and gives users the option to place their fingers through the middle hole for greater stability. It also provides better leverage to turn the key more easily.

While these products are useful, they may not be the most exciting. So let's not forget products that can light up your favorite jewelry lover's face. Magnetic jewelry clasps eliminate frustrations with hard-to-open traditional jewelry clasps and make it easier for people to put on and take off their favorite bracelet or necklace without assistance. Sold at most craft stores, they are a cheap and easy solution (set of 5 for \$3.79). For those who don't want to alter their existing jewelry, many jewelry designers on online shopping sites such as [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com) create bracelets and necklaces that have the magnetic closures already built in.

For more information about any of these products, or for more great gift ideas, ask the AT program today!

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## Apple Launches New Website for Accessibility Initiatives

Apple products such as the iPad, iPhone, and iWatch have become commonplace in society, with people of all abilities using them every day for work, school, and leisure. The countless apps and built-in accessibility features of these iOS devices have turned them into "all in one" assistive tools for many individuals with disabilities, helping them to be more independent and interactive.

Recently, Apple launched a new website aimed at helping users with disabilities learn more about the built-in accessibility features in each of their devices. The Apple Accessibility site offers videos, tutorials, and information, in one easy-to-find place. It breaks down the available options for each device based on a user's needs, such as vision, hearing, physical & motor skills, and learning & literacy. This resource can make it easier for users to discover how to individualize their iOS device to make it work best for them.

Explore Apple Accessibility at <http://www.apple.com/accessibility/>.

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Learn how to  
customize your iOS  
device to make it  
easiest to use for you!

Alternative formats of  
this newsletter are  
available upon request.

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