



Ataxia Tips

Real advice from real people living with Ataxia.

Refill travel-size shampoo and conditioner bottles instead of handling full-size ones. Smaller bottles are easier to grip and less likely to be dropped in the shower.

Submitted by Shawn Barnett

Use boat bags to carry items below the waist, keeping your arms free for balance. Holding things at chest height or in both hands can throw off your stability.

Submitted by Patrick Callahan

To feel more stable while standing, place your feet in a wide base, with one foot slightly in front of the other and your front knee slightly bent. This helps reduce wobbling.

Submitted by Elissa Fisher

I do the laundry by putting it in a bag and tossing it downstairs. After washing and folding, I carry the bag on my back and use double handrails to climb stairs hands-free.

Submitted by Stephen Trusedell

Gel pills can be frozen—this makes them easier to swallow, even the larger ones. It's a simple trick that really works.

Submitted by Pam Wetzels

My throat specialist recommended swallowing pills with yogurt instead of water, because water can go down the wrong pipe and that's bad for you.

Submitted by Dave Roy

Install handles in all your doorways leading in/out of your house. These handles have been extremely helpful to me in stepping up/down a step or just crossing a threshold.

Submitted by Cheri Bearman

Tired of spilling drinks? "The Incredible Spill Not" is a drink carrier that allows you to carry a cup without spilling. It's available on Amazon.

Submitted by Mike Cammer and Ginny Atwell

My Mom has a difficult time picking things up from the floor. I purchased lightweight grabbers and put them in several rooms so there is always one ready when she needs it.

Submitted by Brenda Sommers

Never carry anything if you can figure out a way not to. For example, I use a lidded commuter cup for coffee and keep all supplies near the coffee maker.

Submitted by Julia Kay Pantoga

I very much recommend the My Cane, which is a pivoting quad base cane, because of its lightness, stability standing alone, and quality. It has saved me many times.

Submitted by Gérard D

Things got so much easier when we installed a second bannister on the stairs in our home. Can't move to single story at this point but railing on both sides makes it safer!

Submitted by Christine Bielski

I use a bag with handles if I ever have to carry anything in from the car and I'm by myself.

Submitted by Julie Wesson

I use a clothespin instead of a twist-tie to close bread bags.

Submitted by Donna Roysdon

Carry a cellphone on you at all times in a zippered lanyard or crossbody; easy to reach and won't fall out of reach if you fall; also big enough to hold ID, cards, etc.

Submitted by Karen W.

Wearing water socks inside has been a game changer! It gives me the grip I need and is easy to put on and forget.

Submitted by Shawn Davis

My speech therapist recommended that I take a sip of water after every bite of food. My upper esophagus is moving too slowly so food sits there and is uncomfortable. But the water after each bites helps push down the food.

Submitted by Mary Beth Mattison

Shower shoes have made showering so much easier. It helps so much with the slipperiness.

Submitted by Nicola Vrabel

My doctor recommended that I look down rather than straight ahead while walking. Helps with the balance.

Submitted by Charles N.

Electric toothbrush helped me brush more thoroughly without constantly stabbing myself.

Submitted by Anonymous

Grippy stickers on my phone help me drop it less.

Submitted by Anonymous

For swallowing pills, my doctor recommended putting your chin down when you swallow meds with water. Counter intuitive, because I always put my head back. It's so much better, as he directed!

Submitted by Nancy Quackenbush Bennet

Another thing I found valuable is that when I do balance exercises, music really helps with tapping and heel raises in monster walking. I've tried all different kinds of music and found Fleetwood Mac and any kind of country western music, which I usually don't particularly like, help a lot. I swear, the movement and coordination, especially is helped by listening to music with a good beat while exercising.

Submitted by Patricia Graham

Tennis wrap works great as a way to add grip to a cane or walking stick. If you get padded under wrap you can just change out the thinner over wrap when it gets old.

Submitted by Shawn Davis

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these tips are those of the individual and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Ataxia Foundation (NAF). Any medical information shared is based on personal experience and has not been reviewed or endorsed by NAF or a medical professional. Always consult with your own physician or qualified healthcare provider before making any changes to your care or treatment plan.

Visit www.ataxia.org/tips to submit your advice for others.

Questions? Contact us at naf@ataxia.org.