

# Free and Inexpensive Apps for Communication With Patients

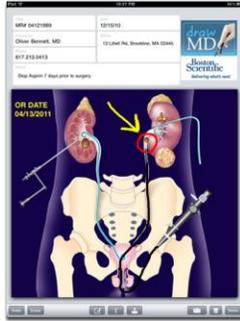
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*Health workers can now access a rapidly growing body of mobile apps that are useful in overcoming communication barriers in a wide variety of health care settings, from doctors' offices to emergency room, to bedside, to intensive care units, to elderly care facilities and, indeed, throughout the continuum of care. These communication barriers account for a far greater number of significant medical errors than many medical professionals acknowledge, and they impact a far larger proportion of the patient population than most people have yet understood.*

*Mobile phone and tablet apps have the special appeal of ease of access and convenience in situations where time so often is of the essence, and space is so often limited (e.g., inside ambulances, or at bedside). The apps listed below represent just the tip of the iceberg of the resources that are now so quickly becoming available, but they illustrate the broad range of purposes that can be met by mobile apps in health care settings, for people with language and cultural differences, for people with transitory or long-term communication difficulties, for those with low health literacy, and for other significant segments of the health care population. (Apps are listed from least to most expensive, and all prices are in US dollars.)*

1. *drawMD* (<http://www.drawmd.com/#>)
  - What is it? drawMD is an app that helps doctors explain treatment plans and medical procedures to their patients by drawing on virtual maps and charts. The doctor shows the patient an image – such as a part of the human body – and makes notes, circles or other notation to visually explain to the patient the problem and intended treatment. An email option allows the doctor to send the images to the patient as well. Currently, there is only one type of drawMD available ([Urology](#)), but the producer has planned eleven more – including Anesthesia & Critical Care, General Surgery, OB/GYN and Pediatrics.
  - How much is it? Free
  - Platforms: iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
  - Reviews: As this is a new product, there are not yet many reviews, but initial critiques of drawMD Urology are positive and call this a “fantastic” app.



2. *ICE app* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ice-app/id327155819?mt=8#>)
  - What is it? This app is a reference for first responders and emergency room personnel. The user stores name, contact, medical, allergy and insurance information so that emergency responders have quick access to it.
  - How much is it? Free
  - Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
  - Reviews: One user writes that “this app takes care of all the basics.” Some users say that the app crashes, however.



3. *My Talking Phone* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-talking-phone-free-text/id385793450?mt=8>)
  - What is it? A text-to-speech app that lets the user type and talk with the device’s keyboard. Users can adjust the pitch and speed of the voice.
  - How much is it? Free
  - Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
  - Reviews: Users find My Talking Phone “simple” to use; however, several reviewers commented that the app had a lot of ads.



4. *NeoSpeech: NeoPaul* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/neopaul/id334254353?mt=8#>), *NeoJulie* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/neojulie/id334272012?mt=8>), *NeoKate* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/neokate/id332623803?mt=8>)

- What is it? These NeoSpeech apps are natural-sounding, text-to-speech devices. Paul has the voice of a US male; Julie and Kate have the voice of a US female. The app also permits text-to-speech in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Texts may be typed or pasted, and can be stored in a library.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Many users have noted that this app is ideal for people who cannot speak. Others like the “natural” voices and how users can adjust the speed and volume of the sound.



5. *Phrase Board* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/phrase-board/id380424676?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This iPad app is designed for patients with speech difficulties. Users can indicate where and how much they hurt with scrollable lists and a chart of the human body. Phrase Board also lets users type custom messages, or even draw messages. The app is text-only.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
- Reviews: Reviews have been favorable, especially since the app is free. One user said Phrase Board “has all of the basic functions needed for a patient’s communication needs when speaking is not an option.” The main downside is the lack of a speech functions, but as one user noted, “what makes it worth looking at is the free hand ‘draw’ feature that lets you draw with your finger if you don’t know a word.”

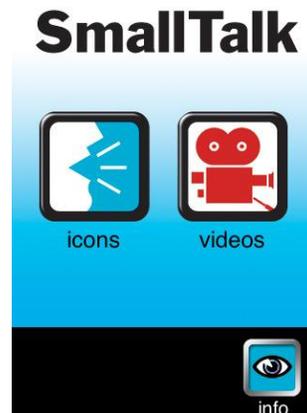


6. *SmallTalk Aphasia* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-aphasia/id310102858?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This app contains phrases and images to help people who have difficulty speaking. Users select the word or phrase, then let the app “speak.” The categories include doctor’s appointments and emergencies. Users can personalize

the vocabulary as well. There is also a mouth-positioning feature that helps the user practice speaking at his or her own pace.

- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Users call this app “a real find for folks with communication challenges.” Although the vocabulary is “limited,” and there is no gender option, reviewers agree that the app is easy to use and facilitates communication for those with special needs.



7. *SmallTalk Dysphagia* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-dysphagia/id337184701?mt=8>)

- What is it? A communication app specifically intended for people with dysphagia; it contains a bank of 50 phrases and words based on eating equipment, meal assistance, diet, medication and other treatments. There are 4 video demonstrations of treatment techniques for swallowing.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: A user with dysphagia says that it “fills an important void.” Equally appealing is the ability to customize the app to one’s needs.



8. *SmallTalk Intensive Care* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-intensive-care/id403057381?mt=8#>)

- What is it? An app to help patients with speaking difficulties (whether because of an impairment or because of an operation) express their needs to medical care providers in the ICU. Users choose from picture-based vocabulary to “speak”

phrases like, “I am in pain,” or “I want to be comforted.” The pictures that match the words make this app useful for non-English speakers as well.

- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Reviewers found the app useful for the ICU, though one user said that the interface “was not great.” The pictures are self-explanatory and make the app a convenient tool for non-native English speakers.



9. *SmallTalk Pain Scale* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-pain-scale/id403058256?mt=8>)

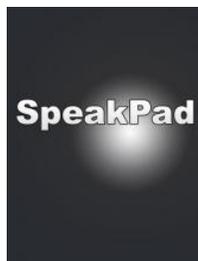
- What is it? This app contains a series of images and pain descriptions that let the user communicate the type and level of pain. It is designed for people with aphasia, apraxia and dysarthria.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Some reviews mentioned that this app does not allow for sentence construction, or any editing. However, it does allow for a great deal of specificity by offering vocabulary for “body parts, positional words, and pain-related adjectives (dull, sharp, aching, radiating, etc.).”



10. *SpeakPad* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/speakpad/id367250475?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A text-to-speech app that can speak a typed message in 22 languages and 42 voices. This app will read aloud web pages, emails, and other documents, and it lets the user save, edit, share and even Tweet their own texts.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.

- Reviews: One user SpeakPad called it “the best text-to-speech app I have ever seen.” The voice quality to said to be very good, although users do not have the ability to save voice files. Another user commented that the buttons should be larger and pointed out that the app cannot upload PDF files.



11. *Talk Assist* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/talk-assist/id329338159?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A text-to-speech app that allows users to “speak” by typing a message and then having it read aloud. The phrases may be saved, and a bookmark feature lets users store favorite phrases for frequent use.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Reviews say that Talk Assist has a “simple” interface and is overall a good app. However, users would like to see an option for a female voice. Another user wrote that Speak It (which costs \$1.99, see below) is a better app despite the price.



12. *Verbally* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/verbally/id418671377?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A text-to-speech app intended especially for people with AAC needs. Users type the phrase that they wish to convey, and Verbally speaks it. The app allows users to choose from several male and female voices and three different keyboard layouts. For ease of use, the app has a word predictor and two core grids – one for words and one for phrases. There is no need for an internet connection to use it, either.
- How much is it? Free
- Platforms: iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
- Reviews: Verbally has received good reviews. Though the voices could be improved, the app’s “purpose and functionality make it so valuable.”



13. *Answers: YesNo* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/answers-yesno/id337470555?mt=8>)

- What is it? This app has two large, colored buttons to easily allow a nonverbal person to respond to “Yes-No” questions. A voice reads aloud the word. The app was specifically designed for people with autism and other communication difficulties. ([A newer, HD version](#) lets the user choose from 5 different voices and make up to 6 custom buttons.)
- How much is it? \$0.99 (\$1.99 for HD version)
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1 or later. (HD version requires 3.2 or later.)
- Reviews: The parent of a son left mute and quadriplegic after a stroke said that the app was easy to use and gave him a “consistent” way to communicate.



14. *Emergency Information ICE* (<http://market.android.com/details?id=ice.app>)

- What is it? This app stores medical information so that it may be quickly accessed by emergency medical services. The information includes name, blood type, contact information, medical history, emergency contacts and insurance policy.
- How much is it? \$0.99
- Platforms: Android
- Reviews: While some users write that similar apps do the same service for free, others say that it is very useful and “handy for any medical situation.”



15. *HeartWise Blood Pressure Tracker* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/heartwise-blood-pressure-tracker/id311716888?mt=8>)

- What is it? An app that lets the user track and monitor blood pressure, resting heart rate, and weight. The app automatically calculates pressure rates and body mass index (MBI), and it stores the information for future reference. The information can then be exported as an email, spreadsheet, or text file. The app is available in English, German and Spanish.
- How much is it? \$0.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 4.0 or later.
- Reviews: The app is “easy to use” but some users report glitches with the interface. However, one such user said the app is still worthwhile because it tracks weight and heart rate.



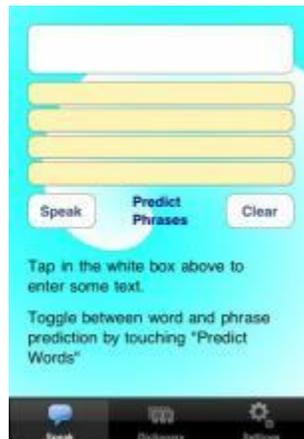
16. *Speak Aid* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/speak-aid/id356743683?mt=8#>)

- What is it? Intended for people unable to speak because of surgery, disability, accidents or stroke, this app helps users communicate while they are recovering and undergoing therapy. The app helps the user answer “yes-no” questions and indicate pain and other needs by touching a stick figure and a selection of buttons.
- How much is it? \$0.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: No reviews are available at this time.



17. *Easy Speak* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/easy-speak/id382620857?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A predictive, text-to-speech app. It has a dictionary with over 4000 words and phrases that can be modified based on the user's needs.
- How much is it? \$1.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1.3 or later. Must be downloaded from iTunes.
- Reviews: The father of a special needs child praised the app's "portability" and called it a "good effort" towards making iPod/iPad devices more AAC-friendly. A criticism was that the pronunciation was limited to British English.



18. *Pillbox Alert*

([https://market.android.com/details?id=com.sartuga.android.pillboxalert&feature=search\\_result](https://market.android.com/details?id=com.sartuga.android.pillboxalert&feature=search_result))

- What is it? A pill-reminder app. Users enter the type, quantity and time to take medication or dietary supplements; they receive an alarm when it is time to take each dose.
- How much is it? \$1.99
- Platforms: Android
- Reviews: Not only is Pillbox Alert an "excellent way" to keep track of medications, it is a good tool for use in the hospital so that personnel are informed of the patient's medication needs. A few users noted that they only received the notifications when the app was open on their devices.



19. *Speak it! Text to Speech* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/speak-it-text-to-speech/id308629295?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A text-to-speech app that allows users to copy articles, emails, PDFs and other documents to be read back to them. Users can also type their own text and hear it spoken. Speak it! lets users send audio files, save phrases and choose from a choice of voices (other language versions, including French and Spanish) may be purchased for an extra \$0.99).
- How much is it? \$1.99
- Platforms: Android, iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: The MDA has called Speak it! “useful” for people with disabilities. Other user feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with one reviewer calling its voice quality “on par” with Kindle. Some expressed difficulty copying and pasting a large amount of text, but were pleased with the app’s overall quality.



20. *YES/NO Bilingual* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/yes-no-bilingual/id356655278?mt=8>)

- What is it? This app functions as a communication board for yes/no questions. The board is in English and Spanish, and offers a choice of male and female voices in both languages.
- How much is it? \$1.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1.3 or later.
- Reviews: This app has been well-received, with positive feedback from bilingual SLPs. Another user said that “[p]eople with communication disorders need tools like this to express their opinion.”



21. *mym3* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mym3/id366238553?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This app helps a patient check for potential depression and/or anxiety disorders (including bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress). The user takes a brief test and receives a personalized report that can then be shared with a doctor for further prognosis. The information can also be saved, so the patient and his or her doctor can track the symptoms over time.
- How much is it? \$2.99
- Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: No reviews are available at this time.



22. *Universal Doctor Speaker* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/universal-doctor-speaker-full/id389202856?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This app is designed to help doctors communicate with patients who speak a different language. There are six language options (Chinese, English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish) with more than 500 words and phrases for each. The app includes translations for sharing general medical information, accidents and common illnesses. There are two settings, one for the patient and one for the health care professional.
- How much is it? \$5.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
- Reviews: One user calls this app “a must have” that can be used for travel as well as emergencies.



### 23. Medical Spanish – Audio (Emergency Medical Spanish

Guide)(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/audio-medical-spanish-emsg/id297917901?mt=8#>)

- What is it? Designed for non-Spanish speaking health care professionals, this app is a quick reference of medical phrases in Spanish. The vocabulary and phrases provided help health care workers to learn what Spanish-speaking patients need, as well as their medical histories. There are more than 250 questions and phrases, with the option of Yes/No format for easier communication. All of the phrases have audio.
- How much is it? \$6.99
- Platforms: Android; iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Many users say that the app is helpful, especially in a hospital setting. Others have found errors in translation.



### 24. AutoVerbal Talking Soundboard PRO (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/autoverbal-talking-soundboard/id368727888?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A text-to-speech app that allows users to create their own messages or choose from built-in phrases, and play them back to others. The app has hundreds of built-in phrases from 16 categories, but also lets users customize specific messages or commands according to their needs.
- How much is it? \$9.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: Caregivers and special needs instructors like this product. One user considered it “a long term major tool” to help a stroke victim who had difficulties speaking; another remarked that it was “a great additional tool” to help her non-verbal autistic students communicate. While one reviewer thought some of the

word choices were “odd” and not always practical, the overall consensus is that this app is helpful for those with speaking difficulties.



25. *Expressionist* (<http://www.apptism.com/apps/expressionist>)

- What is it? Expressionist is a visual learning app that teaches over 120 common expressions and over 1000 nouns from 7 categories (common phrases/greetings, feelings/emotions, senses, health & well-being, actions/activities, requests, questions). The app teaches the expressions with a composite approach picture, instead of multiple pictures.
- How much is it? \$9.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.
- Reviews: One reviewer called it “brilliant.” While some of the words are mispronounced, and “the artwork could be improved,” its composite picture approach “makes these concepts easier to understand” for people with complex communication needs.



26. *iConverse* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/iconverse-assisted-communication/id304852637?mt=8#>)

- What is it? An alternative communication app that offers six communication tiles expressing basic needs (bathroom, drink, food, sick, break, help) in both audio and visual form. A recording feature and a text-to-speech function let the user create his or her own buttons.
- How much is it? \$9.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.0 or later.

- Reviews: Reviewers like the app overall, but would like to see more buttons and a sentence construction feature.



27. *My Choice Board* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-choice-board/id384435705?mt=8>)

- What is it? A visual aid for showing preferences, especially designed for those with non-verbal autism or other communication difficulties. The user has a “choice board” of up to 6 images, and with the phrase, “I want” at the top, forms a sentence by picking the desired image. A voice can then read the sentence out loud. The boards can be saved and sorted depending on the user’s needs. Another feature shows a red X on an object if the object is unavailable.
- How much is it? \$9.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 4.0 or later.
- Reviews: Reviewers like the way that the app lets users customize boards to their tastes. According to one parent, it is a “great way to communicate wants” if a child has a communication disability. Users would like to be able to make more sentences with the app, though.



28. *Chronic Pain Tracker* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/chronic-pain-tracker/id330294020?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This app lets the user enter information about his or her chronic pain – the place, level and description – so that it may be shared with doctors. Information can be converted to email, PDF, XML and CSV formats and can even be shared on Facebook to discuss with other individuals who suffer from chronic pain. Users can also track pain medications and chart which ones are most effective.

- How much is it? \$14.99. A [free version](#) is also available, but only allows the user to store up to 20 pain entries.
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1.2 or later.
- Reviews: One user raves that Chronic Pain Tracker “is worth far more than the asking price.” Because it gives both written and visual assessments, it is extremely useful for doctors and patients alike in tracking and managing pain.



29. *Pictello* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/pictello/id397858008?mt=8#>)

- What is it? An app that lets users of all ages and skill levels create talking photo albums and books. On a single page, users can upload a picture and record up to five lines of text (or have typed text “spoken” by the app). While no Internet connection is needed to play or create stories, the stories can be shared through the iTunes Sharing File or via WiFi on the Pictello Sharing Server (users can get an account for free). This app can be adapted for use in any setting to express any particular theme or need.
- How much is it? \$14.99
- Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 4.0 or later.
- Reviews: Users are raving about this app. *Autism Epicenter* gives it five stars, praising its “well-designed and pleasing to the eye” interface that makes it easy for autistic people to share their stories. Other reviewers like the voice quality and feel that they can make the albums and stories “personalized.” An SLP teacher who works with students with AAC needs commented that it can even be used to teach the steps to a process.



30. *Scene Speak* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/scene-speak/id420492342?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A communication app that creates visual scene displays to help with memory, speech or order. The user uploads images and arranges them in a “sound area,” a visual scene that follows a theme – for example, the doctor’s office. The user can record a phrase to go with an image relating to that theme (such as “I’m in pain” for a health care setting). The app includes five preloaded voices (but the user can record his or her own audio as well) and eleven generic, modifiable scenes (including the doctor’s office, the bedroom, and a “What hurts?” body chart). Scenes can be combined to form a “book” of a certain theme.
- How much is it? \$14.99
- Platforms: iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
- Reviews: Users like this app a lot, deeming it well-worth the price. A Speech Language-Pathologist writes that it both “enhances language skills” and gives “a voice to my non-verbal students.” Reviewers praise the ease with which a user can customize the app, as well as the positive support and receptiveness from the developer.



31. *TapSpeak Button* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tapspeak-button/id359998293?mt=8>)

- What is it? A convenient switch that records and plays messages. The user can record and store an unlimited number of phrases of unlimited length. Created by the father of a child with both cerebral palsy and cortical vision impairment (CVI), this app is ideal for patients with temporary or habitual difficulties with expressive communication and for “voice banking” in hospitals.
- How much is it? \$14.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1 or later.
- Reviews: This app has received good reviews from parents of children with complex needs, as well as from Speech Language Pathologists. One mother said that it gives her daughter a “voice to be able to tell her teacher what she has done;” an SLP said that “it has real potential” for her students. Users like the ability to store unlimited messages, though a few mentioned they would like to be able to play multiple messages at once. Overall, users find it helpful and simple.



32. *Assistive Chat* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/assistive-chat/id379891874?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This text-to-speech app is specifically designed for people with augmentative and alternative communication needs. It uses word prediction to minimize the number of keystrokes needed to type a phrase – allowing the user to communicate at a more efficient pace. Other convenient features include three voice choices, large font and buttons and a favorites list to store commonly-used phrases.
- How much is it? \$24.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1 or later. Manufacturer recommends iPad for people with accessibility issues, because of its larger screen size.
- Reviews: Users find the word prediction feature “fantastic” and “significant” in allowing people with speech difficulties hold a conversation. A customer with ALS said that it had a “simple” and accessible interface. One reviewer mentioned that his app did not work with his iPhone 3GS internal speaker (Assistive Apps, the company who makes the app, recommends it especially for iPad), although it was fine with regular earphones.



33. *Voice4u* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/voice4u/id339916109?mt=8#>)

- What is it? This is a vocabulary app that helps people with communication impairments to express thoughts, feelings and needs. The user selects words and phrases to be read aloud, with a choice of words from more than 150 pre-loaded images or from an unlimited number of uploaded images. The vocabulary can be sorted by category, in alphabetical order, or by preference.
- How much is it? \$29.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.1.3 or later.
- Reviews: The father of an autistic child “highly recommended” Voice4u, saying that it helped his son communicate better – which has in turn resulted in fewer tantrums. Another user noted that there is no sentence construction option.



34. *My Talk* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mytalktools-mobile/id324286288?mt=8#>)

- What is it? A communication app that lets users customize their own messages with pictures, images and audio files (even voice recordings). Users can upload images straight from the Internet to personalize the phrases that they want to speak (while freeing up memory on the device). Users are given a 30-day free trial period before purchasing it.
- How much is it? \$39.99, but with a free 30-day trial period.
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS 3.2 or later.
- Reviews: Parents of autistic children have found this app very useful and easy to use. A grandmother said it has made her autistic granddaughter “an able communicator,” letting her do things from sharing stories about her day to storing notes from class. Parents love how it lets their children personalize phrases and “seems to anticipate every scenario.” The simple interface and customizable features earn My Talk rave reviews.



***Expensive but Especialy Useful App***

1. *TouchChat AAC* (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/touchchat-aac/id377558828?mt=8>)

- What is it ? A text-to-speech app that lets the user record his or her own voice or choose from five synthesized (English) voices. Users may select from preinstalled pictures or upload their own to represent the items they wish to point out. The app

also features word prediction and four “page sets” (vocabulary that targets particular communication needs).

- How much is it? \$149.99
- Platforms: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad. Requires iOS4 4.0 or later.
- Reviews: As one reviewer puts it, “It’s one of the most pricey app’s I’ve seen, but it packs a very big punch.” It works well and has a lot of features that make it worth the price.

