

Voice app puts disabled phone users in charge

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Disabled people or anyone with their hands full can now control smartphones almost entirely by voice.

The technology from Google was designed to make app use easier for people with paralysis and diseases such as Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis as it goes much further than previous voice-command functions.

Android phone owners with the Voice Access app can use spoken commands such as "scroll down" or "go back" to navigate around their other apps and to compose and edit text.

Significantly, the new interface overlays numbers on the icons and controls on the phone's screen. Users simply say the relevant digit instead of tapping the device. This offers far greater control than Google's voice-activated assistant, which is limited to preset commands.

Stefanie Putnam, an American quadriplegic equestrian who has competed at the Para-World Championships in carriage-driving, tested prototypes and provided feedback to Google. She said that tasks such as taking photos, sending texts and composing emails had previously been very daunting for her.

Putnam uses Voice Access with her phone mounted on her wheelchair. She said: "You use your voice and you're able to access the world. It has become a huge staple in my life."

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