Adaptations for the Kitchen

• The Kitchen is one of the most important rooms in the house. Preparing and eating food is not only recreational, but it is vital for health and independence.

• Physical access for persons who use wheelchairs:

• There should be sufficient space to properly navigate a wheelchair. Therefore, the widths of the door openings are crucial. There should generally be at least 32 inches of space to properly enter and exit. Special swing-away hinges can be cheaply installed to increase the free space by as much as 3 inches. If the entrance is accessed from a 90° angle there must be additional room to pivot during the maneuver.

• Floor surfaces should be smooth (i.e. tile) or a short carpet weave. Longer carpet styles and thick padding can make pushing a wheelchair more difficult.

• Plastic guards are available to protect the counters and refrigerator from scratches from wheelchairs.

• Opening a refrigerator from a wheelchair can be difficult unless sufficient space is available next to the handle side of the refrigerator door. If a person must approach the refrigerator from the front, the door will likely strike the foot supports and prevent entry. A person should maneuver their chair next to the refrigerator, open the door, and then move to the center to grab the needed item. Some refrigerators have ice, water and other small compartments that can be accessed from the outside without opening the main door.

• Counter tops and sinks should be approx. 30” off the floor with sufficient space to move a wheelchair into position underneath. If this is not possible, retractable cutting boards can be installed that allow the user to be in a good position for cutting and preparing food. Adjustable tables are available that can be customized for all activities such as working on puzzles, card games, as well as use by all members of the family.

• Counter surfaces immediately next to the stove tops or counter top heating units should be the same height to eliminate the need for lifting heavy pots on and off the burner. They can merely be slid into position - an act requiring much less strength and with a much lower risk of injury.
• Adjustable height cupboards can be installed to make the contents accessible to all persons. The cupboards are mounted on a track, and can be moved up or down with an electric motor and control unit.
• Considering the arrangement of items in the kitchen area can also be helpful. Place heavy and frequently used items at a convenient height (most often it is lower) and near their place of use.
• A large variety of bags and other carryall type devices are helpful when wheelchair users need to transport items from one area to another. Some attach behind the chair near the user’s back, and others enable items to be stored under the seat. They come in a variety of sizes and colors.
• Light switches can be adapted with rod-like extensions to make them accessible from any height.

• Adaptations for persons with reduced hand function:
• Many persons, due to stroke, arthritis, or other impairments to their hands, require special assistance in the kitchen. Many specialized tools are available to assist them in doing hand oriented tasks.
• Adapted drawer pulls that have a large C shaped opening allow a user to place his/her hand inside and pull with the wrist. This eliminates the need to grasp drawer knobs with the fingers.
• Lever handle faucets give better leverage and a bigger target for those with weakness or tremors. Adapted knob turners can be added to a conventional knob for the same effect.
• Electric vegetable peelers, enable peeling with only one hand.
• Cooking baskets fit inside a traditional pan, and allows the user to lift only the food portion out when serving. This enables the user to avoid lifting the pan and water during use.
• Specially designed carving utensils have closed handles and contour grips, which make use easier for persons with weak hands.
• Jug tippers allow safe, easy pouring of liquids with only one hand. The jug is placed inside a cradle for easy manipulation.
• A jar holder can be purchased in which jars are placed in a small, easy to use vice. The unit stabilizes the jar to facilitate one-handed opening.
• Special easy-open containers allow the user to prepare food with less strain on the hands and wrists.
• It is possible for persons without use of both arms to feed themselves independently. The user pushes a switch with his or her chin, and a motorized unit moves the food into position for eating.

**Personal energy conservation and safety:**

Some individuals have limitations in endurance that makes it difficult to prepare an entire meal without rest. The following suggestions will assist persons in making efficient use of their available energy.

• Rounded corners on counter tops and furniture are safer for those who have poor balance and may stumble.
• Persons who are able to walk but have poor balance benefit from wheeled carts or “trolleys.” These items allow the user to transport heavy or bulky items around the home with minimal effort. It is a good idea to measure the height of the counter top and match the trolley to it as closely as possible. This will enable the user to merely slide objects back and forth and save a great deal of energy.
• Walkers can be enhanced with bags or trays to free the user's hands during use. It is very dangerous for some persons who are unsteady or at risk for falls to attempt to carry items in their hands while using a walker.
• Adjustable height stools are a good idea for those who stand some of the time but need to rest periodically. A stool is higher than a conventional chair, and requires much less effort to rise from when the work is finished. Some walker designs enable the user to use it as a seat when needed. This frees the user from having to transfer from one device to another.
• Use small and/or electrical appliances to conserve personal energy.
• Use lightweight utensils and tools.
• Avoid bending and stooping – use reachers when possible.
• Arrange work areas so commonly used tools and supplies are easily reached, i.e., a Lazy Susan.

**Adaptations for persons with visual impairments:**

All persons who use the kitchen will benefit from a well-lit environment. It is especially important that persons with visual impairments have sufficient lighting to work safely.
Items with oversize letters such as timers, thermometers, microwaves, and scales can assist persons with mild to moderate visual impairments.

These same items can be found in designs that also “talk” to the user. They can be particularly beneficial for persons who are blind. A liquid level indicator alerts the user when a cup is full.

Puffy paint can create 3-dimensional raised surfaces. It can be used to customize materials or add identification marks on any surface. Persons who cannot see may then feel the item for its identification marks.

Install contrasting counter tops and floor materials. This allows the individual to see the edge of the counter.

**Other kitchen aids:**

- Anti-scald devices will monitor the water and prevent it from reaching a dangerous temperature.
- Silverware can be coated with a soft, rubbery material to prevent accidental injuries during eating. This is desirable for persons who have reduced sensation in their mouth or have reduced control when biting.
- Some cups have a section removed on the top surface that would normally hit the user’s nose. This adaptation enables persons to tip a cup despite reduced movement in their neck.
- Auto shut-off timers enable burners to be used more safely by persons with memory or attention limitations.
- One-way straws reduce the amount of unwanted air that may be taken in during drinking.

**RESOURCES**

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<th>Accent Information</th>
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<td>Brain Injury Association of America</td>
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<td>Capabilities, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Accessible Housing</td>
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