



# Independent Living Tips for Cooking and Dining

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Eating a healthful, well-prepared meal can be one of life's great pleasures. If you have difficulties handling food preparation tools or silverware, this information on aids and adaptations to use in the kitchen and dining room may be useful.

## FOOD PREPARATION

**Cutting, peeling and chopping:** Cutting boards can be bought or made with stainless steel nails pointing up to hold meat, fruits, vegetables, cheese, etc., for one-handed cutting or peeling. Some have a raised angle for buttering bread. A peeler mounted on a clamp can be attached to a table top or a cutting board; the apple, carrot or potato can be pushed or pulled across the blade with one hand. A hardwood chopping bowl comes with a five-bladed chopper and features a non-tip plastic base, at some medical/surgical supply stores. Also available is a grater with suction feet and a bin to hold grated food.

**Opening and closing containers:** An electric can opener can prevent a lot of frustration. Make sure the one you buy has nonslip rubber feet and a mechanism that can open any shape of can. Jar openers also come in many designs and are widely available.



Jar Opener

Boxes can be slit open with a knife and closed with a piece of masking tape or a rubber band. Plastic bags can be resealed with a rubber band or clothes pin by twisting the bag shut and tucking the twisted end under the rubber band.

**Mixing and beating:** Bowls should be heavy enough to prevent sliding: a rubber ring on the base, a Dycem mat or even a damp cloth can help. Bowls with handles are widely available. A hole cut in a piece of plywood or hardwood set over a drawer or sink will help steady a bowl while you use it, increasing your counter space at the same time. If the bowl is flush with the board's surface, you can easily push ingredients into the bowl as they are prepared. Blenders, electric mixers, and food processors can be a big help; if you buy one, make sure the features are useful for your particular cooking needs, and that you can operate the controls.

**Cooking:** To hold a pot or pan steady while you stir, try a wire frame attached to the stove with suction cups. You can also push the handle against the back of the stove or another pot to



stabilize it. The lightest, easiest-to-manipulate pots are made from aluminum, stainless steel, and copper. These metals are also good conductors, so they heat and cool quickly; you will need to stir more frequently with light-weight pots.

Casserole dishes and oven-to-table ware of ceramic, porcelain, Corningware, and tempered glass come in all sizes and weights. They're heavy, but designed to look good on the table, which means less transferring of food from one container to another.

Handles and knobs: Make sure the shape and size of handles and knobs are well-suited to the strength and flexibility of your grip. A long handle lets you brace against your wrist or arm, or use both hands, and also makes reaching a back burner easier. Handles on both sides of a pan distribute weight more evenly, but are sometimes smaller, and require two hands with good coordination. A clip-on handle, available where camping supplies are sold, can function as an extra grip for a heavy or awkward pot.

Lids should have a knob that won't slip out of your grip. You'll find replacement knobs at hardware stores. If you use a reaching aid, choose a knob that works well with your aid. Any part of a pot that you touch should be well-insulated. Plastic and wood are the safest materials; solid and hollow core metal handles will heat up eventually and could cause a burn.

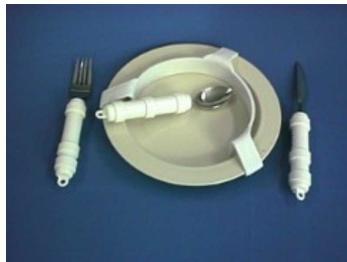
A tipping platform can make handling a teapot easier and safer.

For frying bacon and thinly sliced foods, a cast aluminum fryer sits on top of the food, reflecting heat downward, so that it cooks without turning or stirring. A drainer/strainer that clamps over the pot is also a good idea. Oven mitts are essential when working with hot things; you can also use a reaching aid for some jobs. A commercial pizza shovel makes a good reacher to pull hot dishes out of the oven.

Place heatproof pads around the kitchen and use them as resting stops when carrying heavy, hot items over long distances. If you use a wheelchair, use a heatproof lapboard or wheelchair tray so that you can use both hands for traveling.

## TABLE SETTING

Attractive table settings brighten mealtime and enhance the appreciation of good food. A variety of specially designed plates, dishes, cups, glasses and silverware are described here: you may find other designs in catalogs from the manufacturer of independent living aids.





Several manufacturers have designed plates with a curved inner wall and a slightly raised outer rim to help guide food onto your fork or spoon. A heavier plate prevents slipping and retains heat longer. Other options include: a non-slip scoop dish, which makes it even easier to push food onto your spoon; a partitioned plate; and dishes with high sides around all or part of the circumference. Available in ceramic or Melamine at medical/surgical supply stores.

A pedestal cup has been designed to make drinking easier for people with a weak grip. A lidded cup reduces spills and controls the flow of liquid; this design is particularly useful for people in bed.

**Look for these features in a cup:**

- ✓ Easy to grip handle(s)
- ✓ Insulation or large handles to prevent burns
- ✓ A wide base for good stability when empty or full
- ✓ Break resistance
- ✓ Easy-to-clean finish

Products are also available to adapt your own tableware; a plate guard in plastic or metal to help guide food onto your fork or spoon; non-slip matting to keep plates from sliding around; handles or wide bases to add to glasses or mugs for better stability; and angled or bendable straws which permit drinking from a regular glass while lying in bed.

**Silverware:** Specially designed knives, forks, and spoons described here can be found at medical supply stores and some “gourmet” kitchen shops. They have been designed to help you overcome the problems of weak grip, lack of flexibility, limited range of motion, and poor coordination.

A built-up handle makes it easier to grasp eating utensils. The simplest way to do this is to buy a length of Rubatoze at a medical supply store; this is a foam-rubber tubing that comes with a variety of bore dimensions to fit a range of handle sizes. Or, you can use a child’s bicycle handle grip. Several manufacturers make cutlery with square, round, oval, or built-up handles of varying lengths in light, standard, or heavy weights. Shop around to find which version is best for you. If you have trouble moving your wrist, fingers, or arm, try a fork or spoon with a swivel or self-leveling mechanism.

Extension spoons and forks to assist with limited range of motion can be set at any angle.

Also available are utensils designed to be attached to the palm rather than gripped by the fingers; the angle can be adjusted to compensate for lack of range of motion. Speaking of angles, you can buy “bent” or offset forks and spoons angled left or right in a variety of shapes. Knives come with straight or curved blades, either smooth or serrated, for easier cutting. A person with one hand can cut food easily by rocking a Nelson knife back and forth across the food. Another suggestion: an ordinary pizza cutter can be sharpened and used as a one-handed food cutter. Combination utensils are convenient if you don’t use both hands, or if coordination is a problem. Known as “knoons,” “knorks,” and “sporks,” they come in several



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different designs and weights, some with built-up handles.



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