

Increasing Independence with Food Preparation

Aids and Adaptations to help to increase independence:

Positioning: It is less tiring to work sitting down, a perching stool will enable you to rest comfortably at a suitable height for a kitchen work surface. It can be easier to collect all the items you need first, and position them in easy reach, while making sure you still have a clear work surface for food preparation.

Storing food: Store objects at the logical point of use, e.g. food need the work surface and chopping boards. Store frequently used equipment on the work surface or close by to where you use it. Store heavy equipment at waist height.

Moving food and objects: Wherever possible arrange work surfaces so they are continuous and at the same height, so equipment e.g. pans, can be slid along rather than lifted. Trolleys can be useful for transporting items around the kitchen/classroom environment. One-handed trays are also available, with a handle that rises over the centre of the tray so that it can be balanced safely with one hand.

Stabilising items: Non-slip mats make many tasks easier and safer, for example holding mixing bowls in place. Non-slip mats are available in various shapes and sizes, or on a roll that you can cut to size. One-handed food workstations can assist those who have difficulty in gripping items or can only use one hand. They can have a clamp to grip items, spikes to secure food for chopping/peeling etc, and corner guards to assist with spreading. They can also come with other attachments such as graters or slicers.

Chopping, cutting, grating and mixing: There are a range of utensils with easy to grip, padded or angled handles, which are easier and safer to use if you have limited movement and strength of grasp. Easy to grip scissors with a spring can require less strength to operate. It may be easier to use scissors to cut meat rather than a knife. Food processors, blenders and juicers can also be invaluable for chopping, grating, mixing, etc. A hand-held 'stick blender' can be used to mix the contents of a bowl or saucepan with the press of a button.

Slicing: Cutting guides are available for slicing bread and meat. These have upright pillars to hold the knife steady and make cutting safe and simple. The width of the slice can often be adjusted as necessary.

Spreading: Spreading boards are available, with two slightly raised edges at right angles to each other. The slice of bread is laid next to these edges to stop it from moving around during spreading.

Peeling: Peelers with broader handles require less movement at the wrist. There are also battery-operated or electric peelers commercially available. A grater/peeler unit has spikes to hold food and a separate scraper section, vegetables are rubbed against the scraper to remove the peel. The scraper can also be used as a fine grater.

Opening cans: Adapted can openers are available with handles that lock together with a single squeeze, and so do not need a constant strong grip to hold them together. Electric can openers, suitable for one-handed operation, are also available. Ring pull can opening tools are also available.

Opening jars and bottles: There are a variety of grips to choose from. Some gadgets grip the lid while you turn the container; others grip the container while you turn the lid.

Boiling: When boiling items in a saucepan, it can help to place a mesh wire basket, e.g. wire chip basket, or sieve, inside the saucepan before adding the vegetables. Once cooked, the vegetables can easily be drained by lifting up the basket. This prevents the problem of needing one hand to hold the pan, and another to hold the lid/strainer, and tipping to pour off the excess water. Alternatively, a steamer basket that sits on top of a pan of boiling water, cooks the vegetables without contact with the water.

Microwaving: A microwave can be very helpful as cooking requires minimal handling. Proper microwave cookware, which is designed to absorb less of the cooking heat, will be cooler to handle.

Toasting: Toast tongs are available which help you get hot toast out of the toaster.

Boiling a kettle: Use a lightweight jug to pour liquids, you can also use it to fill up a kettle. To avoid having lifting heavy kettles a kettle tipper can be useful. Alternatively mini jug kettles are light to lift or hot water dispensers/kettles will dispense boiling water into the cup with a press of a button. Make sure the water does not get spilt and keep yourself safe from burns and scalding.

Snap-on aprons: These have a bendy plastic waistband with a snap-fastener, avoiding the need for tying a bow behind the back.

Advice and Tips to help increase independence:

- Ensure skills are practiced under supervision until deemed safe to do by yourself.
- Start with simple tasks and meals, for example making a sandwich, or beans on toast, and progressing to more complicated tasks, such as pasta and other meals.
- Plan and review the task/recipe before starting, so each step is clear. This will help in getting everything ready that is required, and working out which tasks may need assistance. Writing out a list of equipment and as well as the ingredients may be useful.
- Plan and set up tasks so that everything is within easy reach, leaving you a clear workspace to prepare food. For example collecting all the ingredients before starting.
- Opening packets, jars and bottles are good things to practice, aids can help if they are difficult to do.
- If you are struggling for grip, plastic gloves might help.
- Ensure there is enough preparation time before cooking; this may take longer than you expect, especially to start with.
- The tidying, washing up and wiping down of surfaces are also important tasks.

Related Websites:

Adapted from:

<http://www.independentliving.co.uk/?advice=kitchen-safety>

<https://www.headway.org.uk/media/7911/coping-with-hemiplegia-and-hemiparesis-factsheet-2019.pdf>

Other useful websites:

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/top-10-tips-cooking-kids>

Website: www.children.nhslothian.scot

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Facebook: @NHSLothianAHP **YouTube:** Children and Young People's Therapies and Support

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