



Choosing household equipment

DLF Factsheet

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this factsheet is to provide first stop information about the more common difficulties encountered when carrying out household tasks such as cooking and cleaning; and about a number of the more popular items of equipment that may provide solutions.

For up-to-date product and supplier information, contact our equipment helpline which is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm, Tel: 0845 130 9177 (all calls are charged at local rate) or if you use a textphone 020 7432 8009 (charged at standard rate).

Alternatively you can write to our letter enquiry service or contact us via e-mail at advice@dlf.org.uk. To help us give you a concise and informative reply, please provide us with as much detail as possible including information on the difficulties you are having and any solutions you have considered, including equipment ideas.

WHERE TO GET HELP AND ADVICE

It is always advisable to seek independent advice before buying equipment; sometimes an alternative approach to housework and cooking can provide a better solution, or the local council may be able to provide equipment or services to help you.

Everyone, including carers, has the right to ask social services for a community care assessment. The council assessor will consider the type and level of need and suggest a range of solutions that may include provision of equipment. Usually the council helps fund a community care service, including equipment, if you have many needs or if your needs are essential or complex. Some services on offer that might help include the use of the local community transport scheme to get to the local supermarket; a home help to assist with household tasks; membership to a local dining club or meals-on-wheels.

Since April 2003, people have the choice and right to ask for a direct payment of money instead of a council community care service. This includes the right to ask for money towards alternative equipment if this is preferred to the equipment offered by the council.

If your needs are few or simple, a council may not help directly but may advise on alternative ways of meeting your needs, e.g. where you can buy equipment locally, where your local Disabled Living Centre is, or refer you to suitable mail order catalogues (see DLF factsheet 'Daily living equipment suppliers').

A Disabled Living Centre (sometimes also called an Independent Living Centre) provides impartial advice and the option to try out equipment. For the address of your nearest centre contact the Disabled Living Centres Council. Disabled Living Centres tend not to keep information on standard

domestic appliances. The organisation Ricability has produced some guides to help people choose appliances, looking specifically at features that are useful to disabled or older people. In addition, the consumer advice service run by the Good Housekeeping Institute can help by identifying the makes and models that have the features you require.

Another choice, instead of waiting for a council assessment, is to fund a private assessment from an independent healthcare professional such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. Lists of private practitioners are available from the College of Occupational Therapists and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists.

Home adaptations

If you are a private householder and need advice on minor alterations and repair work, contact the organisation Foundations which can refer you to a local home improvement agency. Sometimes Age Concern is able to offer advice.

For more complex alterations or adaptations, and advice on meeting future needs as well as immediate needs, ask your community occupational therapist who can be contacted via your local council social services department. You can also seek independent advice on building design issues from the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE). The CAE has publications and design sheets for minor and major alterations. It also keeps a

database of architects, surveyors and similar professionals with experience of designing for disabled people.

For details of the organisations mentioned above - see useful organisations.

PLANNING YOUR ROUTINE

- If you have difficulties managing everyday tasks, you should review what you do and how you do it. Ask yourself:
- is the task essential and how often does it need to be done?
- are there times in the day when you are more able? For example, are you less tired in the morning, or do you move freely or have less pain after you have taken medication?
- try to balance what you do each day so that you combine tasks that take more effort with gentler ones; you are then less likely to have days when you have over-stretched yourself.

HOME LAYOUT

Does the layout of your home help or hinder you? Does furniture obstruct plug sockets? Do you have excess furniture which requires moving for you to access areas for cleaning?

Do you make the best use of your storage space? Are appliances that you use

regularly easy to access? Consider both cleaning and cooking items, where they are stored and how often you use them. If you have to bend to pick them up, stretch overhead or reach over other items, try to find an alternative, more accessible storage place. Get rid of anything that you do not need or use. Consider replacing older appliances which may be less efficient, heavy or have awkward control switches with newer models. The organisation Ricability publish a range of Ability guides which look at the features of standard domestic appliances, considering their relevance to consumers who are disabled or elderly.

In the kitchen, the cooker and sink should ideally be close to each other with adjacent work surfaces providing areas for food preparation and somewhere to put food and equipment. The fridge also needs to be in fairly close proximity so that you can cut down on moving around the kitchen.

GENERIC DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS

Below is a list of common difficulties and some general ideas to help you manage housework and kitchen activities.

FOR PEOPLE WHO TIRE EASILY

Look at the tasks that you do and prioritise them. Non-essential tasks can be done less frequently (or not at all).

Spread out strenuous activities throughout the week.

Take frequent rests between tasks.

Keep essential items at hand.

Consider carrying out kitchen tasks sitting on a perching stool.

Use labour saving gadgets.

FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFICULTY BENDING OR REACHING

Avoid storing regularly used items in places that are difficult to reach such as the back of cupboards, at the top of wall units or in low cupboards.

Use carousels and pull-out or pull-down storage to improve access to places that are difficult to reach.

Do not impede access by placing furniture in front of areas you need to reach regularly.

Use long-handled devices to extend your reach.

FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A REDUCED OR PAINFUL GRIP

Avoid lifting or carrying heavy objects whenever possible. A household trolley may provide a solution to this.

Use both hands, therefore distributing the load.

Choose lightweight equipment and appliances, if available.

Use devices that have specially designed hand grips or add an enlarged grip.

Use devices to help with open jars, turning taps etc.

Use labour saving gadgets.

FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE USE OF ONE HAND ONLY

Use spike boards, clamps or slip-resistant mats to stabilise items.

Use a trolley or one-handed tray to transfer items from room to room. A shoulder bag worn across the shoulders can be used for less delicate items.

Look for equipment that has been designed for left handed use if your left side is the stronger side.

Choose electrical appliances carefully, making sure that two hands are not required to operate them or, if you are using your left hand, that controls are not positioned for right handed use..

Use pan handle stabilisers and wire basket inserts when cooking.

FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

Keep your home environment free from clutter; keep only what is essential and

make sure everything has a set place.

Use colour contrast to highlight boundaries and to make locating items easier.

Store items in a logical and set sequence. Use carousels and pull-out drawers for easier access to storage areas.

Use tactile or colour contrasting labels. Use gadgets that give an audible output, for example talking weighing scales.

FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE UNSTEADY ON THEIR FEET

Be wary of loading items onto walking devices if they have not been designed as load carriers, since this will upset the balance of the walking aid.

Use a walking trolley to assist in transferring items from room to room.

Provide stable handholds by fixing grab rails in strategic places.

Avoid over stretching to reach objects.

Keep circulation areas clear of hazards, for example loose rugs.

Use a wire basket insert in a pan when cooking vegetables. This can be lifted out when the vegetables are cooked and the water disposed of later when it is cooler.

FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE FORGETFUL

Plan a daily routine, and stick to it. If necessary write your weekly timetable down and display it where it will be easy to see. Include a column for non-routine tasks, for example appointments.

Use a calendar that has plenty of space for notes. Tick off the days as they pass.

Write down a shopping list as you get low on items. Throw old lists away as soon as you have shopped.

Try to keep an uncluttered household; have a place for everything and put everything back in its place.

Use alarms as reminders, for example a timer when cooking.

Fit smoke and gas alarms.

Consider using telecare equipment, especially if you are on your own for significant periods of time. Telecare is a way of guarding against adverse incidents in the home by using technology to raise an alert at a remote monitoring centre.

PERSONAL SAFETY

You should ensure that whatever you do in the home, however you do it, you are not putting yourself at unnecessary risk.

SMOKE ALARMS

Fitting smoke alarms is of paramount importance in all households, but where the home occupier is less able and would find it more difficult to evacuate the home in a fire emergency, the advanced warning that a smoke alarm gives is vital. You should fit a minimum of two alarms, one upstairs and one downstairs.

Battery powered smoke alarms are readily available, but you may need to ask a relative or friend to fit them for you. If this is not possible, then contact your local fire safety officer as, in some areas of the country, fire safety officers can arrange for some detectors to be fitted for you. Mains powered alarms should be fitted by an electrician, but they have the advantage that the power source is constant. Battery alarms must be routinely checked to ensure the power is not getting low. Standard smoke alarms make a loud noise when triggered, but if you have a hearing impairment and are anxious that the noise will not be sufficient to alert you, you should buy one that triggers a vibrating pad and/or a flashing light.

MINIMISE RISK OF FALLING

Make sure your home is adequately lit especially at night on landings and staircases or anywhere else where there is a potential hazard. Keep areas uncluttered, especially stairways where there is a higher risk of falling, and consider fixing a second hand rail to help

you up and down the stairs, particularly if you have winder stairs. Avoid loose rugs and trailing flexes.

If you have difficulty carrying items from one room to another, use a walking trolley which has been specifically designed to give a degree of support. Do not carry large items that obstruct your field of vision.

Take your time to do things. Avoid rushing to the door or telephone when the bell rings; if the caller is someone you know, they will understand that it takes you longer to answer their call. Consider installing a door entry intercom.

Rest if you feel tired or giddy. Do not feel tempted to push yourself to do just that little bit more or over-stretch to reach something. If you are anxious about being less steady on your feet, arrange an appointment with your GP to discuss the possible causes and solutions.

If you feel you are at risk of falling, and live alone or are alone for long periods of time, then consider an alarm system that can alert another person should you fall. There are various alarm systems available commercially. Most local authorities now run a community alarm system which can be rented, and which is linked to a warden locally. You should be able to get information about a local scheme through the social services department of your local authority.

IN THE KITCHEN

Burns and scalds most commonly occur in the kitchen, but a few simple ideas can help to reduce risk:

- keep saucepan handles turned inwards so that you do not accidentally knock into them;
- take extra care when handling hot liquids. Cordless kettles are less likely to get caught up. Do not overfill your kettle, as this will make it more difficult to handle. Consider using wire basket inserts in saucepans so that contents can be more easily removed and drained;
- take care when removing items from the oven. Pull-out oven shelving may make this task easier. Make sure there is a clear work surface nearby on which you can place items you are using. Longer length oven gloves will protect your forearms.

GAS AND ELECTRIC HEATERS

Heaters, including mobile gas fires, can be protected by wire mesh guards. These will protect you if you fall against the heater and also reduce the risk of fire should you accidentally drop something nearby.

IF YOU ARE FORGETFUL

If you cook by gas or if you have gas fires and you are anxious you might forget to ignite the gas after you have turned the

appliance on, fit a gas detector that will sound a warning alarm. Some systems will also turn off the gas supply automatically if levels are raised.

If you have a tendency to put pans on to boil and then forget about them, get into the habit of always setting a timer placed in a convenient and obvious location.

OPENING DOORS AND WINDOWS

DOOR HANDLES

A door latch that opens with a knob rather than a lever handle is more difficult to manage because a firm grip on the knob is required to turn it successfully. There are sleeves that fit over a door knob to make turning easier, or an extension handle can be added to convert the knob into a lever handle.

Some standard lever handles do not leave sufficient room between the handle and the door to enable a person with stiff hands or joint deformity to grasp easily. Others are small in diameter, but grip can be improved by adding a sleeve of plastazote tubing or a purpose designed handle extension. Some more specialised styles of lever handle are contoured for easier gripping; or the lever may be extended so that it can be operated by using the forearm. On cupboards doors, D-shaped handles are generally easier to manage than knob styles.

DOOR LOCKS

Home security is essential, so managing locks and bolts is vital. Make sure that locks are well maintained to make turning them easier. The handle on a Yale type door lock can be increased by using a specially designed knob that fits over the existing one. Some Yale type locks have a draw back latch instead of a knob which may be easier to manage. Keys can be put onto a key holder which makes them easier to grip and which also makes the keys easier to find. A simple form of safety chain is available which can be used easily and quickly if your hands are stiff or your vision poor.

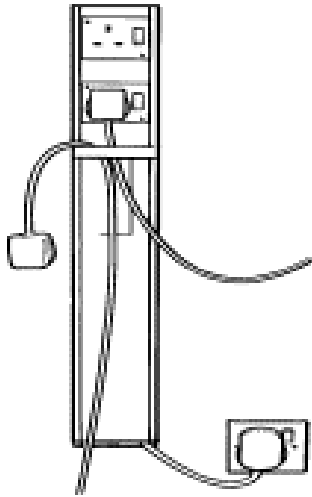
WINDOWS

High or casement windows are often difficult to reach, but are useful because they provide ventilation without making your home too vulnerable to intruders.

A simple extension handle makes opening and closing high level windows easier; or you could consider installing a geared window opener which can be manually operated by a winding handle or electrically powered via a wall switch or remote control.

HOME ELECTRICS

WALL SOCKETS AND PLUGS



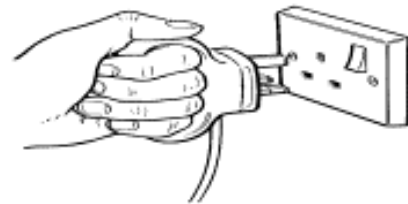
Wall sockets are commonly sited at a low level and can be difficult to reach. Ask an electrician to raise regularly needed plug points to waist level to make them more accessible, or use a special wall-fixed extension socket which plugs into the lower socket and transfers power up to two sockets at a higher level.

Plugs can be difficult to grip, and to insert and take out of sockets. Plugs with hand grips which are part of the plug or added to an existing plug will make this task easier.

LIGHTING

Light switches can be replaced with large rocker switches which are easier to hold or with touch sensitive switches. Pull cord switches commonly used in bathrooms are easier to grasp if they have a ring-shaped handle at the end.

Changing the light bulb in pendant lighting is a difficult task so placing a lamp in rooms that are constantly in use will give you a secondary source of light. Changing the light bulb can wait until the daylight hours and, if you feel at risk doing it yourself, ask a relative or neighbour to help you. Some shops sell pendant lights on a coiled flex which can be pulled down to a more accessible height. Fitting a long life energy efficient bulb would reduce the need to change the bulb, as they should last for several years.



CARRYING ITEMS

Transferring items from one room to the other or up and down stairs can be particularly difficult if you use a walking aid or if you have difficulty grasping items that are small or heavy. Walking sticks and crutches are not designed to carry loads, so hooking a bag over a crutch handle may make you unstable and increase the risk of you falling. On some walking frames a tray or basket can be attached to the front of the frame. These should not be used to carry heavy items as, again, the balance of the walking aid will be disrupted.

TRAYS

A one-handed tray is useful if you usually walk with a stick or crutch in one hand, or if you use a grab rail along the wall to help you to walk.



These trays can also be covered with a slip-resistant mat to keep items in position on the tray.

A bean bag tray will mould to the shape of the lap of the user and may help a wheelchair user to carry items from room to room.

TROLLEYS

Specially designed walking trolleys give a degree of walking support as well as providing a means of transporting items relatively safely. Trolleys with larger wheels will negotiate door thresholds, changes in floor surface and longer pile carpets better than small wheeled trolleys. Front castors will make turning corners easier. Wooden and metal framed versions are available, some have a single shelf others are two tiered. A common feature on two tiered trolleys is a recessed lower shelf which makes space for the legs as the user steps forward. Some trolleys have been

designed for use as a small table with a recess at the side so that the trolley can be pulled close up to the user when they are seated.

UPSTAIRS AND DOWNSTAIRS

A one handed tray could be used to take small items upstairs - this would leave one hand free to grasp the banister rail. If you need to use both hands, a shoulder bag worn diagonally across the shoulders will provide a solution to transporting less delicate items. Larger items are more of a problem. If storage space allows, keep a second set of cleaning essentials upstairs and perhaps include a carpet sweeper to avoid the hazard of carrying a vacuum cleaner up and down stairs.

DRINK PREPARATION

BOILING WATER

Keep the items that you need for preparing drinks close to the kettle, and choose a place for your kettle close to the sink for easier filling but not immediately next to it so that there is no danger that the electrical connections will get wet.

If you find filling your kettle difficult consider the following options:

Fill your kettle via the spout but make sure, particularly if you have a jug kettle that it fits easily under the tap;

Choose a kettle with a hinged lid so that it is easier to reposition;

Fill your kettle up by using a small jug or mug;

Consider using a microwave to boil a single cup of water- this is also more energy efficient;

Uses a small capacity kettle, travel kettles are very compact;

Use a heating element which is mains powered and can be used to heat up a single mug of water.

It is useful to have a water level indicator on the outside of your kettle but make sure that you can see it, particularly if you are left handed. Use only enough water for your needs.

A cordless kettle that simply slots onto a base plate is easier to manage than one that plugs in, and a curly flex will not trail and is therefore safer.

Use a kettle tipper if you have difficulty lifting and pouring out hot water. These are platforms that tilt forwards when gentle pressure is exerted on the kettle handle.



Tipppers are available for jug style and conventional style kettles; and you can also buy them for teapots.

For further guidance, refer to *Choosing an electric kettle that is easy to use* published by Ricability.

HANDLING CARTONS AND BOTTLES

If you have milk or juice delivered to your home, consider attaching a rack to your wall at waist height so that you can pick up the bottles from the step without bending; or use a long handled milk bottle holder.

Cartons can be difficult to open, but there are some simple hand held devices to help pull up the tab or pierce the carton. If you have difficulty handling cartons, or larger milk containers, you could dispense what you need for the day into a small jug which will be easier to lift and pour.

INSULATED DRINK CONTAINERS

If you lack the confidence to make hot drinks for yourself, consider using a thermos flask which can be filled up at the beginning of the day, perhaps by a relative or friend. Some flasks have a spout and the contents are dispensed by a pump, cutting out the need to lift and pour. An insulated teapot may be useful if you need two hands to pour out tea or if you are at a higher risk of scalding yourself because of reduced sensation or because you have a visual impairment.

LIQUID LEVEL INDICATORS



These are devices to help people with a visual impairment pour out liquid into a cup. They hook onto a cup and beep when the required liquid level is reached.

DRINKING EQUIPMENT

There is a wide range of drinking equipment available to help maintain independence and safety, ranging from cups and mugs with contoured handles or two handles, to insulated and spouted mugs. For advice and further information refer to DLF factsheet Choosing Eating and Drinking Equipment.

FOOD PREPARATION

Preparing meals can be made easier by buying pre-prepared food, e.g. vegetables that have been washed and sliced, but this is a more expensive option and may well be out of the question for low income households or if you are cooking for a family. Some general tips to help with preparing food are:

- store food and utensils close to areas where they are going to be used, e.g. store vegetables near the sink;

saucepans near to the cooker; and a bread board next to the bread bin;

- label items clearly and store them logically if you have a visual impairment;
- use labour saving gadgets to carry out tasks such as whisking, mixing and grating;
- use a perching stool if you find it difficult to stand up to do tasks;
- clear up as you go along so that you are never short of space or without the utensils you need.

OPENING JARS AND BOTTLES



There is a wide range of devices to help open screw top jars and bottles. Some simply improve your grip whilst others provide an extended lever to assist with turning. The systems for gripping the lid vary so it is worthwhile looking at different models and comparing ease of use in relation to your personal needs. To use a hand-held device, you will need one hand to stabilise the jar or bottle, whilst the other hand operates the opening device. There are a few jar and bottle openers which are wall mounted. To use these, you must push the top of the jar into the

opener and turn the jar. It may be possible to do this action one handed.

STABILISING JARS AND BOTTLES



If you have the use of one hand only, you will need to stabilise the jar or use a wall mounted opener. A simple way of holding a jar in place if you have a shallow top drawer, is to close the jar in the drawer and gently lean against it. Alternatively, there are some specially designed devices to stabilise items.

OPENING TINS

Many tins today are fitted with a ring pull so that a tin opener is unnecessary. However, lifting and grasping the ring pull can be difficult, so you may need to use a hook and lever device designed to assist with this task. These devices are all hand-held and hook under the ring and provide a lever to assist with opening. The task is more difficult if you have the use of one hand only. The stabilising devices that are currently available are really only designed to resist a turning action. A clamping device might work if the force required to pull open the ring pull is not excessive.

Most hand-held tin openers are designed for two hand operation - the left hand holds

the handles together clamping the cutting blade to the tin while the right hand turns the butterfly-shaped key to cut the tin lid. Specialist suppliers of left-handed equipment sell left-handed models. Some openers have a locking mechanism so that a firm grip on the handles during the cutting process is not so important. Some keys are larger and/or contoured making them easier to grasp and turn.

Wall-mounted tin openers have a rotary handle which turns the tin around the cutting blade. If you have the use of one hand only, these styles of tin opener are available with an adjustable height platform to support the tin at a level ready for cutting.



Electric tin openers are available free-standing or hand-held. The operating lever or button is usually positioned for right hand operation, but a left-handed person with reasonable dexterity should manage to operate one. If you have the use of one hand only, a hand-held opener that uses a lever to pierce the tin and initiate the motor to cut the tin is usually the easiest to manage, although some free-standing openers now have an on/off control lever, leaving your hand free to hold the tin, but engaging it in the first place might still be a

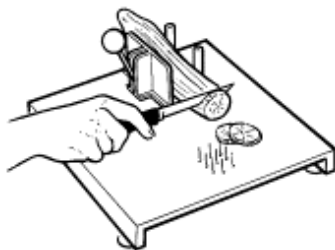
problem. Cordless versions may be lighter and easier to handle.

OPENING AND SEALING OTHER PACKAGING

Self-opening scissors require less effort to operate and could be used to open bags of frozen vegetables or soup packets, for example. These are available for left- or right-handed use.

There are also some table-top scissors which use a push down action. Hand-held devices that include a spike or a blade can help to tear open a bag. Some frozen produce is packaged in bags that have resealing strips running along their top edges. These can be difficult to align, but there is a device that can be used to help you do this. Plastic clips which clamp around an opened bag to seal it are readily available in high street shops or can be ordered from mail order catalogues.

CHOPPING BOARDS AND BREAD BOARDS



A slip-resistant mat placed under your chopping board will help to hold it in place, or some boards are supplied with slip-resistant feet or suction cups on their underside. These are particularly useful if you have the use of one hand only, but

check that you can manage to release the suckers to wash up the board. Some boards also include spikes to stabilise food, and/or they have two raised edges forming a right-angled retaining wall to help spread a slice of bread one handed.

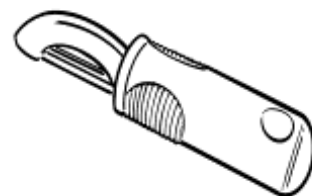
If you prefer uncut bread, but have difficulty slicing it, many bakers and supermarkets now have slicing machines that will slice a loaf of bread and package it in a plastic bag.

If you want to slice a loaf at home, there are bread guides that will help you to cut even slices, particularly useful if you have a visual impairment.

Also useful if you are partially sighted, is a coloured board to contrast with the food you are preparing or a board that has a different coloured perimeter.

Some chopping boards have fold-up sides making a shunt to assist with transferring chopped food into a saucepan or peelings into the bin. An integral handle can help you to position and carry the board.

PEELING AND SCRAPING



A conventional peeler with an enlarged grip or a Y-shaped or horseshoe shaped handle is easier to grip if you have stiff or

painful hands. The latter style can be used right- or left- handed. If you have the use of one hand only, consider using a peeling blade mounted horizontally on a clamp or use a spike board to stabilise vegetables. A vegetable scraper, similar to the fine surface on a cheese grater, can be used to scrape vegetables clean.

CUTTING, GRATING AND SLICING

To make cutting up and preparing food easier, make sure the blades on your knives are kept sharp and use a knife designed for the task in hand. It may be safer and more convenient to store knives on a magnetic knife rack. If gripping a conventional style knife handle is difficult, consider using one that has a larger grip although you will still need to push down through your index finger lying on top of the knife blade. A knife with the handle set at right angles to the blade uses a sawing action and may be more comfortable. This style of knife is available with a smooth or serrated blade.

People with a visual impairment may find a Dux knife easier to manage. This has a thickness gauge attached to the side of the blade. Slices can also be regulated by using a cutting guide.



If food needs to be finely chopped a device commonly referred to as an Autochop may

be useful. This is a cylindrical device which has cutting blades operated by pushing down repeatedly on a plunger with the palm of the hand. Grating and slicing cheese and other food may be easier if a multi-purpose slicer is used. Some versions are supplied with a hand-held spiked device to hold the food during grating. Some also have collection boxes for the grated food which is particularly useful for visually impaired people. Conventional graters are designed to be used with a vertical action; multi-purpose slicers can be used horizontally or at an angle depending on their design.

BAKING AND COOKING

To conserve energy, collect together all your ingredients and utensils before you start your recipe. You will also then get greater benefit from a perching stool because you will not need to get up repeatedly to fetch the things you need.

WEIGHING SCALES

Some weighing scales will weigh your ingredients as you add them to your weighing bowl which may be more convenient as you will not need to tip ingredients out into a separate mixing bowl after each one has been weighed. Weighing scales that have an external dial can be adapted with tactile markings for use by people with a visual impairment. Traditional balance scales could also be used as they allow the user to feel the balance with their hands. Another alternative is to use a set of scales which

speaks the weight as the ingredients are added.

MIXING BOWLS

Blending together ingredients manually can be a particular problem if you have a weak grip or the use of one hand only. A slip-resistant mat could be used under your mixing bowl to help hold it in place whilst you are mixing. This should work well if the contents you are stirring are of a fairly loose consistency. If you are trying to blend together stiffer ingredients, use a bowl with a suction base or a bowl holder. Some specially designed kitchen units have pull-out boards with a circular cut-out for this purpose. If you find this task particularly difficult, consider using a powered whisk or blender.

WHISKS, MIXERS AND BLENDERS

If you need to mix or blend small quantities of food a manual device might be suitable. These usually have a rotary handle attached to the lid. Small blenders are sometimes stocked by shops selling nursery equipment. There is a good selection of powered hand-held devices available from high street retailers. Cordless versions may be easier to handle and lighter in weight. Make sure you can operate and reach the controls comfortably, and that the mechanism for attaching and reattaching parts is manageable. You should also consider the ease with which the device can be cleaned.

If you regularly need to mix, blend, chop or grate food, a food processor may meet your needs better and will take up less space than separate appliances. If you are using the food processor regularly, allocate a space for it on your kitchen worktop to avoid lifting it in and out of a cupboard. Try out and compare a range of different models before you purchase one. Features that you may find useful include:

- a clear plastic bowl so that you can observe the food within;
- a handle on the bowl for easier handling;
- attachments which can be easily handled and positioned;
- controls that are within easy view and not recessed.

SAUCEPANS

Heavier saucepans are more stable and may be better for people with hand tremor; lighter weight ones are easier to lift and handle if you have reduced arm strength or pain. Make sure the handles of your saucepans are made from a low heat conducting material. A second hand-hold, particularly on larger saucepans will help with lifting and positioning it. Saucepan lids should be well fitting but not tight. Most lids have knob-shaped handles which can be difficult to grasp. D-shaped handles are easier and can be lifted with the handle of a kitchen utensil if necessary, but these styles are more difficult to find. Again, make sure the lid

handle is made from a non-conductive material.

Try to avoid lifting a pan of hot water. If your hob is level with the adjacent work surface you may be able to slide your saucepan off the heat. Use a wire basket insert to cook vegetables in. This can be lifted out of the pan when the vegetables are cooked making straining easier. The water in the saucepan can be left to cool down before it is tipped away.

If you are inclined to put food on to cook and forget about it, keep a timer alongside the cooker and try and make it a routine to set it each time you use the hob.

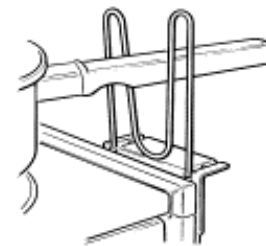
YOUR HOB, GRILL AND OVEN

Choosing to cook by gas or electric is usually a personal preference. A free standing cooker tends to be less accessible than a split hob and oven which do not have to be positioned one above the other; and the oven can be built in at a convenient height. Controls at the front of a free-standing cooker are more accessible than ones sited at the back and at high level where there is also the increased hazard of reaching over hot pans. Some companies offer alternative controls if you have dexterity problems, or controls can be adapted to make them easier to grasp. Some dials can have tactile markings added to make them easier to use if you have a visual impairment.

Some styles of electric hob are ceramic for easier cleaning and have the heating

elements beneath which makes sliding the pans on and off the heat easier. A few models have child locks to prevent the control knobs being turned. Some gas hobs which have a fold-down lid automatically shut off the flow of gas when the top is down which may be an important safety consideration. Others can have an automatic re-ignite or cut-off device should the flame blow out.

Separate hobs have the controls sited along the front or at the side, usually on the right, so if you only have the use of your left hand you will be reaching across your body and possibly the hob itself to use them.



A pan handle holder can be used to stabilise a saucepan if you have the use of one hand only and need to stir its contents.

Eye level grills make it easier to view what you are cooking, but if you are a wheelchair user you will need a lower level grill. A grill pan with two handles helps to distribute the load, but if you have the use of one hand only you will need a single, central handle to lift and manoeuvre the pan. A grill pan that slides out and remains supported will make attending to the food easier.

Fold-down oven doors provide a surface to rest dishes on, but they can also be a hazard when reaching into the oven. A side opening door is considered a safer option. Doors with a viewing panel and a light make it easier for you to keep an eye on what you are cooking.

Glass doors can be 'cool touch' reducing the danger of scalds. Pull out shelving can make attending to your cooking and transferring dishes in and out of the oven easier. Extra length over gloves can be worn to give additional protection against burns.

USING A MICROWAVE OVEN

Microwave and combination ovens have several advantages over conventional ovens:

- they are compact and can be more easily sited at a convenient height;
- they are versatile and can be used to cook a variety of different foods;
- they cook quicker and are therefore more economical to use;
- it is easier to cook small quantities of food;
- less liquid is needed for the cooking process;
- plastic containers can be used which are lighter and do not conduct heat.

Cooking only commences when the timer is set and will remain on for the pre-set time which means there is less risk if the oven is left unattended.

Microwaves have either dial controls or touch sensitive controls. Dials can be more easily adapted if you have a visual impairment; touch controls may be easier if you have poor dexterity. A talking microwave is available to help people who cannot rely on touch.

For further guidance on choosing a microwave, refer to *Choosing a Microwave that is Easy to Use* published by Ricability.

WASHING UP

Turning taps on and off will be easier if they are lever controlled. Taps with a standard head can be adapted by using special tap turners which fits onto the tap head.

Some styles of mixer tap have one lever to control hot and cold mix and water flow, usually by up and down, and left to right movements. Some people may find this style easier, although the lever is usually small and will require grasping. Longer levers can be operated with, for example, the elbow. If you have a single spout mixer tap, make sure the spout can be swivelled easily out of the way.

Washing up will be made easier if you choose your cookware carefully. Use non-stick pans whenever possible. Look at the

shape of glasses and mugs - can you reach the bottom easily? A bottle brush may help you. Try to use as few cooking items as possible, e.g. choose dishes which could be used for cooking and serving food; or cook vegetables together in one steamer. Consider cooking with a microwave because the cookware is generally easier to clean and the food is less likely to stick. Put your washing up into soak if you do not want to wash up immediately after a meal, so that remnants do not dry on the plates. If you need to use a scourer, a holder for a steel wool scouring pad may make handling easier.

If you have the use of one hand only, e.g. the right, putting items to drain will be easier if the drainer is positioned to the right of the sink. If you have a visual impairment stack items logically, with the larger things at the back. Leave things to drain dry unless it is absolutely essential that they should be put away immediately.

DISH WASHERS

The task of washing up could be made easier by using a dishwasher which should be installed in a convenient and accessible position. If you have difficulty bending, consider using a smaller, table-top or built-in version. A smaller capacity model is also useful if your household is a small one. The drawers of a dishwasher pull out which makes loading and unloading the machine easier. But make sure you can manage to insert the dish washer detergent and salt; that you can access the filter for cleaning; and that the push button and/or dial

controls are easy for you to use. There are obvious running costs involved in using a dishwasher; ideally you should use it once a day at the most, so you need to make sure you have enough cutlery and crockery to use for a day. It may be more economical to run your dishwasher over night.

CLEANING THE HOME

You may find it easier to manage the task of cleaning your home if you compile a cleaning schedule. Decide what needs to be done, daily, weekly and monthly. Identify the tasks that you struggle to do independently and, if possible organise help from a relative or friend. If you are more able at certain times of the day (because you are less tired or because your medication has taken effect), use these times to do the more strenuous tasks, but make sure you do not overwork yourself and suffer the consequences later. The common practice is to clean the home room by room, but it may be more energy efficient to organise your work task by task, so for example, dust all of the downstairs rooms in the morning and vacuum them in the afternoon.

Keep up-to-date with the latest cleaning products; the newer ones on the market may be more effective. Also look at the packaging. Some liquid cleaners are in bottles with trigger handles rather than aerosols and these may be easier to manage. But some have nozzles that need to be turned before use which is rather a fiddly manoeuvre.

DUSTING

Use a long handled mop or feather duster for difficult to reach areas. Some models have telescopic handles which also makes storage easier. Avoid climbing to extend your reach whenever possible but, if you do need to climb, use steps which have a handrail attached. There are some lighter weight, aluminium step ladders available which have three or four rungs maximum and are therefore less bulky to manoeuvre into position.

Try to keep surfaces clear to make dusting them straight forward. Ornaments are better displayed in a glass fronted cabinet because dust is less likely to penetrate. Mount photographs in frames and hang them on the wall. Some specialised dusters have a static charge which helps to pick up dust.

SWEEPING

If you use a wheelchair, consider cutting down the handle of your broom to a height that will better suit your needs. If you find it difficult to bend, use a long-handled dustpan and brush to pick up the sweepings. Some vacuum cleaners pick up dust effectively on wooden and lino floors.

VACUUM CLEANERS

There is very little difference in performance between upright and cylinder vacuum cleaners, but people do tend to have a personal preference based on what they are accustomed to using. Generally,

upright cleaners are better at cleaning larger areas, whereas cylinder cleaners are better at reaching corners and cleaning stairs. There are lighter weight versions of both styles but, when choosing, you should also look at:

- the style and position of controls;
- the comfort of the hand grip;
- the cord release and rewind;
- the ease with which you can attach and detach accessories;
- how you deal with the dust bag.

The Ricability guide *Choosing a vacuum cleaner that is easy to use* offers more specific guidance.

CARPET SWEEPERS

Although these might be considered a bit old fashioned and they may not pick up dust as efficiently as a vacuum cleaner, carpet sweepers are much lighter in weight and are more compact for storage. If you have difficulty carrying your vacuum cleaner upstairs, a carpet sweeper could be used as an alternative, possibly stored in an upstairs cupboard.

LAUNDRY

The use of washing machines and tumble dryers makes the task of washing much simpler. There is a wide range of models to choose from: compact, top loading and

front loading. Compact machines are easier to position at a convenient height. Top loading washing machines may involve less bending, but the user will need to reach down into the machine to take out the clean laundry. Look at the style of controls, the opening of the main door and the soap dispenser tray, as well as the overall performance of the machine. Controls can be adapted with tactile or Braille markings for easier use by people with a visual impairment. Consider placing small items in a laundry bag, a net bag which keeps items together whilst they are being washed.

A tumble dryer offers an alternative if you find pegging out clothes difficult. Clothes that are tumble dried also tend to need less ironing. Some tumble dryers have an integral moisture sensor which automatically turns the machine off when the clothes are dry. You will pay more for this feature but, in the long run, it may save you money and also the hassle of continually checking your washing. Some machines also have an 'intermittent tumble' which turns the clothes over from time to time, after the drying cycle is complete, to minimise creasing.

For further advice on choosing a washing machine or tumble dryer refer to the Ricability Ability Guides on these two appliances.

PEGGING OUT WASHING

A standard washing line may be difficult to reach and also heavy to pull up when

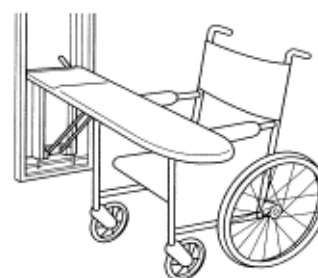
loaded. Rotary clothes lines are generally more accessible; they can be set at a height convenient to the user and some have a winding handle to adjust the height of the main post.



You could use a stand to position the laundry basket at a more convenient height, reducing the need to bend down to pick up items in turn. Some stands are semi-mobile with wheels on two legs and some incorporate a peg bag.

Pegs that require a pinch grip to open may be difficult if your manual dexterity is not good. Pegs that push on to the washing line may be easier to use. If you have a visual impairment, a bleeper to indicate rain may be useful.

IRONING



Opening and folding an ironing board is a task that many people find difficult. A wall mounted one may be easier to manage. These can be set to open out at a height

convenient for the user, whether they are standing or seated and, with practice, can be managed one handed. Another alternative is to use a kit which stores the ironing surface away in a kitchen drawer. If you only have a small amount of ironing to do, a compact table-top ironing board may offer a satisfactory alternative. This style is also useful if you are unable to stand to do your ironing. .

Steam irons require less effort to use than dry irons. Some are cordless and therefore lighter and easier to handle, but they must be returned to their power base to maintain the temperature of the soleplate. Make sure you can manage the controls and see them clearly. Also check that you can fill up the water reservoir with relative ease.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

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Website: www.csp.org.uk

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DLF online

The majority of DLF's advice is now online. If you would like advice and support to get online or information on local courses about getting online please visit one of the following websites.

Age UK

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/>

Call **0800 169 8787**

BBC Webwise

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/>

Call **08000 150 950**

Digital Unite

<http://learning.digitalunite.com/category/using-the-internet/>

Call **0800 228 9272** Or you can write to them

Digital Unite Limited, Unit 2B Poles Copse, Poles Lane, Otterbourne, Winchester, SO21 2DZ

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