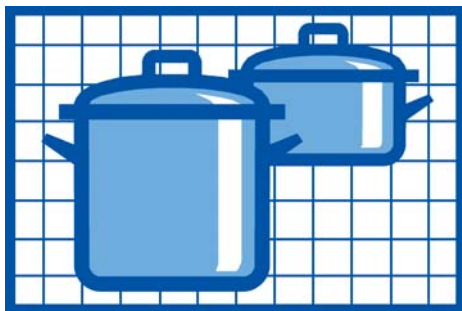


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# What's for Dinner?

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*Independent living tips  
for cooking and dining*



Adapted with permission by the Virginia Department for the Aging from materials created by the University of Iowa.

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 brochure can provide helpful information on aids and adaptations to use in the kitchen and dining room.

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## Food Preparation

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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 food item being peeled can then be pushed or pulled across the blade with one hand. A hardwood chopping bowl with a five-bladed chopper and a non-tip plastic base can be found at some medical supply stores. A grater with suction feet and a bin to hold the grated food can also be helpful.

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## Opening & Closing Containers

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An electric can opener can prevent a lot of frustration. Make sure the one you buy has non-slip rubber feet and a mechanism that can open any shape of can. Jar openers also come in many designs and are widely available. 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 or clothes pin.

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## Mixing & Beating

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Bowls should be heavy enough to prevent sliding; a rubber ring on the base, a Dycem mat (from a medical supply store) or even a damp cloth can help prevent sliding. Bowls with handles are also 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.

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## Cooking

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To hold a pot or pan steady while you stir, try using a wire frame attached to the stove with suction cups. These are available at medical supply stores. 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 if you use light-weight pots.

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

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## Handles & Knobs

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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. It 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 and good coordination. A clip-on handle, available at camping supply stores, 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 can 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.

When frying bacon and thinly sliced foods, a cast aluminum fryer should sit on top of the food, reflecting heat downward, so that it cooks without turning or stirring. A 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 heat-proof 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 heat-proof lapboard or wheelchair tray so that you can use both hands for traveling.

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## 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 in this brochure. You may find other designs in catalogs from the manufacturers 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 easier to push food onto your spoon; a partitioned plate; and dishes with high sides around all or part of the outside of the dish. These dishes are available in ceramic or Melamine at medical supply stores.

A pedestal cup makes drinking easier for people with a weak grip. A cup with a lid reduces spills and controls the flow of liquid. They are particularly useful for people who eat while 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; and
- an 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 (Dycem, available at medical supply stores) to keep plates from sliding around; handles or wide bases to add to glasses or mugs for better stability; angled or bendable straws which allow a person to drink from a regular glass while lying in bed.

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## Silverware

Specially designed knives, forks, and spoons can be found at medical supply stores and some gourmet kitchen shops. They have been designed to help people overcome weak grips, lack of flexibility, limited range of motion, and poor coordination.

A built-up handle makes it easier to grasp eating utensils. Buy a length of Rubazote (a foam-rubber tubing that comes with a variety of bore dimensions) at a medical supply store. You can use it to fit over a range of handle sizes. Or, you can use a child's bicycle handle-grip to build up a handle. 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 one 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 that assist a person 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 the user's lack of range of motion. You can also 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. An ordinary pizza cutter can also 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 different designs and weights, some with built-up handles.

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### For More Information, contact:

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