

LOW VISION COOKING TIPS

When a cook is blind or partially sighted, safety and organization become crucial issues. Accurate cooking demands full use of all remaining senses and organization will go a long way to reducing frustration.

A) Organize the Kitchen

- 1) In order to be able to find things consistently, tools, spices and other items will need to be stored away in the same place each time. Remind others that use your kitchen that it is important that they put things back in their designated space.
- 2) The same principal applies to storing groceries and paper goods you use daily. Plan where to keep each item and be consistent.
- 3) When you can, store food in different types of containers. If you buy your canned goods in varying sizes, you will be able to tell the peas from the green beans. If that is not possible, you can make up index cards with large print, strokes of color or Braille on them and secure these cards around each container with a rubber band. If you use cards on cans, keep them set aside in a safe place as you consume the contents. The cards then become a convenient shopping list!Magnetic alphabet letters are also very useful for labeling can goods.
- 4) Grocery shopping can be accomplished different ways, depending on time and the services available to you. Many markets have employees who will shop with you or you can shop with a friend. You can also shop online or by phone and have the groceries delivered to your home.
- 5) Add an extra light in your kitchen that is brighter than usual. This will help with hard to read recipes and instructions. Install lights under wall cupboards which shine onto worktops. A clip-on spotlight can be used as needed.
- 6) Mat rather than shiny surfaces will help to avoid glare.
- 7) Dark handles on light kitchen units are easier to spot and may help you avoid banging your head.
- 8) If you are pouring a drink, it is easier to see how full the cup is if it is a contrasting color.
- 9) Plugs and sockets are easier to find if they are a different color to the walls and worktops.
- 10) Store your dry goods such as flour and sugar in different sized containers

11) Store frequently-used objects in easy-to-reach locations. Notice what you use most often. Figure out where you will use those most. Infrequently used items, like the roasting pan that you only haul out during the holidays, can go on high shelves or in the back of cabinets. They can even be stored outside the kitchen in the garage, attic, basement, guest room closet, or a box under a bed.

12) If you purchase the same type of cake mix or any other product frequently take the time to write the package directions down in large print or record them with a portable tape recorder to be used the next time.

B) Food Preparation

1) Consider purchasing prepared foods or frozen vegetables to cut down on time spent in the kitchen. Ask the butcher at the market to quarter the chicken or cube the beef for you.

2) Organize equipment and supplies before beginning each task so you have what you need at hand as you need it. To prevent bumps and bruises, keep cabinet doors fully closed. Close drawers once the items have been removed or stored away.

3) Touching food is okay if your hands are clean. Many cooks have always used their hands to squish out lumps in the batter or to kneed dough. You may need to wash your hands a little more frequently. Or you can get used to the feel of textures at the end of a spatula or spoon. Is it slower to stir because it is thickening? Is there more left in the bowl because the surface isn't smooth yet? If you drop the batter or liquid from a spoon into the pot, does the resulting drop sound right?

4) To pour a liquid, use your finger to align the edge of the pot, pitcher or coffee pot with the edge of the cup or bowl. Raise the pot slightly and move the edge over the cup while you pour. Practicing over the sink a few times should enable you to pour with confidence. Listen for the sounds as the cup fills, feel the weight, estimate the time; all are cues for when the cup will be full. An alternative is liquid level indicators that beep when the liquid is close to the edge.

5) Use Braille, large print or color coded measuring spoons and cups. Or mark the ones you use most frequently with tactile cues that won't wash off.

6) Cookie trays make a terrific surface to prepare food on. Any spills or runaway pieces are confined and can be moved to a sink for easy cleanup. Similarly, do your grating or chopping or slicing directly into a bowl.

7) A damp cloth or a Dycem non-slip mat can be used to prevent bowls or plates from slipping away.

8) Use scissors more frequently than knives, i.e., cutting pizza, opening packages, etc.

9) Use a vegetable peeler rather than a knife. Hold the fruit or vegetable in one hand, the peeler in the other. Grasp the handle with your thumb on one side and your fingers

on the other. **Don't touch the moving rod inside the peeler.** Hold the item at a 45-degree angle and, working on one half of the fruit or vegetable, start to peel on the surface, away from your body. Once the peelings have been removed, check the section with your index finger to feel if it is smooth. Peel until the half you're working on is finished. Then turn the item upside down and continue. To determine whether you have any peel left, run cold water over the fruit or vegetable.

10) Using knives can be worrying for people with poor sight. Keep your knuckle against the side of your knife as a guide – this way you can also measure the thickness of the slices you want.

11) Sharp, sturdy knives are safer than blunt ones, and you are less likely to have an accident when using them. Always keep your knives in the same place with the handle foremost to avoid any accidents when reaching for them. Use a different knife for cutting meats and vegetables. This helps to avoid contamination. You can place your knife at 12 O'clock or across the top of the tray when not in use.

12) When spreading, practice with toast. It won't tear as easily as regular bread.

13) With thick spreads like peanut butter or margarine, use an organized pattern to spread outward from a certain point—left to right, top to bottom, or center to outside. You can touch the food to make sure that spreading is complete.

14) Some people find it easier to spread with the back of a spoon instead of a knife.

15) Measure spices into your hand first before pouring into a spoon (some spice containers have a wide opening to insert a spoon), or use measuring spoons with large numbers.

16) Remember to use plastic trays or cutting boards in colors that contrast with your food. For example, keep a white cutting board for slicing red apples or carrots, a dark colored board for onions, etc. Use dark pitchers and servers for milk and other light-colored liquids, a white pitcher for dark liquids such as iced tea.

17) It sometimes helps to use a contrasting colored bowl with different food. For example: stir up a yellow cake batter in a dark blue bowl and brownies in a white bowl. The contrast will make things easier to see.

C) Cooking

1) Many appliance knobs and dials come with existing tactile cues, like a raised letter, and indent or even a screw. There should also be a reference point on the background surface. If there are nothing there, or not enough variations, you can file a small notch; apply bump dots, drops of glue or nail polish. Use minimal markings to keep it simple. For example, on a stove, mark every 100 degrees. It will be easy enough to set the dial at quarter points once you are oriented properly.

2) Microwave templates can be etched or have tactile markings added with either large print or Braille. Be aware not to block heat sensitive portions of the template. It is also

possible to locate inexpensive microwaves that still have dial features rather than templates.

3) When cooking on the stove top use your other senses. Listen for when the eggs boil or feel the vibration of the boiling water on the handle. Does it smell like it is almost done cooking? Or use a tactile or talking timer.

4) Wear short sleeves or roll your sleeves above the elbow when working at the stove.

5) Use the back burners rather than the front ones to avoid accidentally knocking the pans. Put the pan on the burner before lighting it. Always turn off the burner before removing the pan

6) Keep handles pointed away from the front of the cooker.

7) A Stir Chef automatic pot stirrer will keep an eye on sauces that need constant attention and a pan holder will keep pan handles in the same place so you don't have to feel for their position.

Orientation To Stove

8) Orient oneself to the stove while its turned off. Practice several times locating each burner and dials.

(a) Practice placing the pans on the burners so that you become familiar with the distance from the worktop to the cooker.

9) Flat surface stoves can be a problem, but some have tactile contrast to indicate the burner (again, never turn on a burner until your pan is in position).

10) Check the evenness of heat around the pan by holding your palm at chest level and circling your hand to determine the location of the heat source.

11) You can check and adjust the position of the pan on the burner using a wooden spoon.

12) Make sure the handles on the pots and pans and knobs on the lids are heat resistant.

13) It is generally easier to use a double spatula as a turning device. Slide the item to the side of the pan, and then slide the spatula underneath it. With the spatula, move the item to the center of the pan before flipping it over. Make sure you have one hand on the handle of the pan to prevent tipping.

14) Keeping your work surfaces clear of clutter as you cook will mean that you have space when you take something out of the oven.

15) Use a magnifier to read food labels, even if you think you know what is in your hand. Before serving a meal, double check to be sure all stove controls are in the off position.

D) Baking

- 1) Make sure the oven racks are positioned correctly before turning on the oven.
- 2) Always turn off the heat before removing items from the oven.
- 3) When removing items, pull the oven rack partially out rather than reaching into the oven. Remember to push the rack back in and close the oven door as soon as possible after placing the item on a counter or other surface.
- 4) Use special long oven mitts that protect your hands up to your upper arms before removing items from the oven.
- 5) Know where you are going to place the hot item before removing it from the oven.
- 6) Oven doors that open down are safer than ones that open to the side.
- 7) Always use an audible timer when baking.
- 8) Know where you are going to place the hot item before removing it from the oven.
- 9) To easily locate and remove baked potatoes from the oven, bake the potatoes in a muffin tin.
- 10) Food timers and talking thermometers and other devices will help you compensate for vision loss in the kitchen. But you can also use your other senses to determine when food is done. For example, use touch (carefully) to determine when a cake has finished baking, or use the toothpick test—insert a toothpick in the cake, and if you feel batter sticking to the toothpick, the cake is not yet done. Many foods smell a certain way when cooked. Learn to recognize the signals your other senses are sending you.

ADDITIONAL COOKING SUGGESTIONS FOR Individuals Who are BLIND

Please refer to "Low Vision Cooking Tips" for A) Organize Your Kitchen, B) Food Preparation, C) Cooking and D) Baking.

- 1) Organize your ingredients, and develop a labeling system so containers that feel alike will not confuse you.
- 2) Talking tin lids are available. You can record the contents of a tin into one of these gadgets and play back your message at the touch of a button. They are also magnetic so they stay with the tin they belong to.

- 3) Also available in catalogues for low vision aids, is a system which uses barcodes to help with labeling food items.
- 4) Sometimes it's difficult to tell when cookies are brown or the rolls hit that perfect golden color. If you use a timer food turns out nearly the same each time. Use a raised line timer or a talking watch to determine just how long those cookies need to bake. Ask someone to check your oven for accuracy by using an internal thermometer.
- 5) When handling hot baking ware, use oven mitts long enough to cover your hands and lower arms completely. Use an audible timer and be sure you have set it correctly.
- 6) When measuring small amounts of liquids like vanilla or almond extract, use an eye dropper that holds a teaspoon of liquid. You can also use a medicine syringe found at your local drugstore for measuring larger amounts.

PRODUCTS FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

There are many supply companies that offer a wide variety of products for blind and visually impaired people. Catalogues can be obtained by calling:

Beyond Sight: (303) 795-6455, www.beyondsight.com

L S and S Group: 1-800-468-4789, www.lssproducts.com

The Lighthouse: 1-800-829-0500, www.lhb.org/content.php?fcn=store

Independent Living Aids: 1-800-537-2111, www.independentliving.com

Maxi Aids: 1-800-522-6294 maxiaids.com

Ann Morris Aids: 1-800-5237-2118, www.annmorris.com

Sight Connection: 1-800-458-4888, www.sightconnection.com

BOOKS/MANUALS ON COOKING

1) Beyond TV Dinners: Three Levels of Recipes for Visually Handicapped Cooks

P. Canter, M. Cole, B. Hatlen, & P. LeDuc, (1975). Living Skills Center for the Visually Handicapped, 2444 Road 20, Apt. C-105, San Pablo, CA 94806. 201 pp.

This book offers a recipe package for students who need recipes geared to their cooking abilities. The three levels of cooking are directly related to the cooking evaluations that are included in the book.

Subjects Covered:

- Kitchen hints & gadgets
- Level I cooking evaluation & recipes (e. g., instant breakfast, frozen orange juice, baked bacon, baked potatoes)
- Level II cooking evaluation & recipes (e. g., Manwich sandwich, hamburgers, oven chuck roast, chicken and rice casserole, grilled cheese sandwiches)
- Level III cooking evaluation & recipes (e. g., spaghetti, baked meatballs, chili con carne, lasagna)
- The Home Service Staff. (1976). Public Service Company of Colorado, 55 15th Street, Denver, CO 80202. 62 pp.

2) A Manual of Program Instruction in Kitchen Skills for the Visually Impaired Homemaker

This manual covers many aspects of kitchen skills and safety.

Subjects Covered:

- Types of visually impaired persons in the United States
- Guiding a blind person
- Classroom familiarization
- General suggestions: Kitchen familiarization, identification and labeling, aids and appliances, measuring liquid and dry ingredients, cooking and pre-preparation suggestions, touch and feel in cooking, safety suggestions, range and safety precautions, portable appliances and safety precautions
- Plan of action, letters to workshop participants, questionnaire, recipes and techniques, staff training, suggestions related to program presentation, program format, room setup, follow up evaluation

ADAPTED EQUIPMENT/TOOLS FOR COOKING

There are many simple, inexpensive tools you may find helpful in the kitchen.

- 1) Long oven mitts
- 2) Kitchen timer with raised markings or large print
- 3) Liquid-level indicator
- 4) Safety food turner (double spatula)
- 5) Splatter shield
- 6) Cutting board with food chute for pouring

- 7) Cutting boards in light and dark colors to contrast with food
- 8) Color-coded or high-contrast measuring cups and spoons
- 9) Individual measuring cups and spoons (a must)
- 10) Large-print and broad handle measuring cup
- 11) Adjustable knife with a slice guide for adjusting slices
- 12) A 3-D pen (or Hi Marks) for marking appliances
- 13) Card and bar code reader for creating labels that can be read back
- 14) Boil control disc to keep foods from boiling over
- 15) Tomato and vegetable slicer
- 16) The "Talking Temo" Microwave - This is a great product that has shown up in stores like Best Buy and Wal-Mart. It's a talking microwave under \$100. Here are some of the features:

- 0.9 cu.ft. 900W Oven Cavity
- 10 Power Levels
- Digital Display with Clock
- Turntable
- Instructive Talking Programmable Feature
- Interchangeable Voice Language Feature (English/Spanish)
- Eight Instant Settings for Common Foods
- Five Express Cook One-Touch Settings
- Five Memory Setting Buttons
- Remind Signal

The buttons are totally accessible. They're easy to feel, and are much like the buttons on any other appliance or remote control. It also has a little knob that you turn to set the cook times, with a little notch you feel [tactile] each time you turn it so you can easily tell how far to turn it.

You push a button on the knob and it'll ask you to set the minutes, then when you set the minutes you push the button again and it'll ask you to set the seconds. After you do that you push the button again and it starts. It is really easy to use.

17) The "George Foreman Grill" - The George Foreman grill is one of the best kitchen appliances for someone who is blind or visually impaired. You can cook a variety of meals with it such as chicken breasts, pork chops, hamburgers, grilled cheese sandwiches, etc.

EASY TO USE RECIPES:

"Potatoes on the Grill" is a recipe truly unique to the George Foreman Grill and can't be duplicated. They come out like a cross between potato chips and French fries.

Note: You can use any kind of potatoes but red potatoes come out delicious and are better for you.

1. Peel the potatoes and cut them into approximately 1/8 inch strips (You'll find your favorite thickness after you cook them a few times.)
2. Cover them with extra virgin olive oil or light olive oil.
3. Spread them across the grill and try not to overlap them too much. If you cut them a little thicker you'll fit more but you don't want to make them too thick. You can fit about 1 1/4 pounds on a family size grill.
4. Cook them for 25 to 30 minutes. Yes, that's a long time but they'll come out crispy and moist that way.

"George Foreman Grilled Cheese Sandwich":

1. Get out the bread, cheese and a plate to set the sandwich on when you're done.
2. Plug in the George Foreman Grill.
3. Wait while the grill gets hot.
4. Butter one side of each piece of bread if you like to use butter. (This will be the side that is facing outward.)
5. Put the cheese between the bread with the non-buttered side touching the cheese.
6. Once grill is hot, open it up and put in the sandwich.
7. Check on the sandwich every few minutes so it won't burn.
8. When the sandwich is browned unplugs the grill and let it cool.
9. After a minute or so, take out sandwich, put it on a plate and dig in.
10. After eating your sandwich, sponge down the cooled grill.

Vary the breads and cheeses to make it more interesting. For example, try Pepper Jack cheese. You could also try adding fruits or veggies. How about the classic grilled cheese with tomatoes?

BIBLIOGRAPHY/LINKS:

<http://www.dynamic-living.com/news-low-vision-cooking.htm>

http://www.nib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_cookingtips.hcsp

<http://www.nfb.org/Images/nfb/Publications/fr/fr18/fr05sf03.htm>

<http://www.afb.org/seniorsite.asp?SectionID=66&TopicID=303&DocumentID=3256>

<http://www.blindskills.com/publications.html>

<http://www.annmorris.com/cooking.htm>

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/53243/10_tips_for_cooking_with_low_vision.html

<http://fredsheadcompanion.blogspot.com/2007/04/connies-kitchen-confessions-of-low.html>