

IMPROVING YOUR KITCHEN, ONE ADAPTATION AT A TIME

- For older adults who struggle with low vision, preparing their food in the kitchen may become a difficult and dangerous task (Lo, et al., 2016).
- Low vision is caused from various conditions and injuries and can therefore impact just about anyone. However, low vision usually occurs due to age-related conditions.
- Low vision affects 1 in 6 adults over the age of 45, and 1 in 4 adults over the age of 75 (Low Vision, n.d.).
- There are many creative ways that you can change your kitchen to make it easier and more safe to prepare your meals. This blog will lay out many different ways to efficiently adapt your space.

Adaptations:

- **Lighting Tips:**
 - Lighting in the kitchen can be helpful or harmful to those struggling with low vision. It is important to find lighting that best fits your eyesight. Lighting levels for an older adult should be at least 2 or 3 times brighter than the light comfortable for younger individuals (Lo, et al., 2016).
 - Fluorescent or halogen light bulbs show to be beneficial for those struggling with low vision and that is an easy adaptation to make in one's home!
- **Glare**
 - Glare is another thing in the household that can have a negative impact.
 - Use shades, sheers, or curtains to help filter the natural sunlight from the windows and reduce glare (Lo, et al., 2016).
 - Opaque and translucent light shades also help with glare (Lo, et al., 2016).
 - Shiny surfaces, such as your counters, also cause glare. It is suggested to have a matte-finish countertop and surfaces to reduce even more glare. (Lo et al., 2016).
 - An easy way to reduce glare without changing your home is to simply wear sunglasses or a hat (Lo, et al., 2016). Who says you shouldn't be stylish when you're cooking a meal?!
- **Contrast your colors**
 - During food preparation, start using items with contrasting colors. This will allow you to see the items better.
 - Use a dark cutting board for light-colored foods and a light cutting board for dark-colored foods. This will help you see the food easier that you want to cut (Lo, et al., 2016).
 - It will be important to overall have a high-contrasting kitchen so that you can navigate safely throughout. It would be ideal if your countertops and cabinets

were not the same color. When they are the same color it is hard to see when one finishes and the other starts.

- If you have matching countertops and cabinets and do not want to invest in changing either of them, a cost efficient idea is just to paint your cabinets! If you have a dark countertop, paint your cabinets a light color, and reverse.
- Also, it is recommended that if you have dark cabinets or drawers, to have light colored handles (or reversed) so that they can be easily opened.
- If your dishwasher blends in with your cabinets and drawers, consider buying a dishwasher cover magnet in a contrasting color so that you can switch up the front instead of purchasing a new dishwasher
 - Here is one buying option: https://www.amazon.com/White-Appliance-Decorative-Magnetic-Dishwasher/dp/B00CPOYPCI/ref=sr_1_12?dchild=1&keywords=Magnetic+Dishwasher+Cover&qid=1591649804&sr=8-12
- Labeling food is another way for easy access in the kitchen. Purchase colored sticker dots to place on food cans and containers. Create a system that works for the individual and their family.
 - Easy to buy: <https://www.amazon.com/dot-stickers/s?k=dot+stickers>
- Sticker dots are also great for putting on appliances. On the microwave, a family member or caregiver should sticker the frequently used buttons. One idea would be to sticker the 30 second button, the popcorn button, and the start/stop button. This way, microwaving can be done efficiently! You could also purchase bump dot stickers to make it even easier. This idea can also be transferred to the oven and any other appliances that they are struggling with.
 - Purchase the bump stickers here: <https://www.amazon.com/Mixed-Bump-Dots-Sizes-Colors/dp/B00II5TM6W>
- Suggested Tools
 - Liquid filling indicators is a small gadget that is placed in any container and gives off a buzzing noise when pouring the liquid should be stopped. This avoids spilling and is especially helpful when pouring hot liquids to prevent injury.
 - Here is an affordable option! https://www.amazon.com/MaxiAids-Vibrating-Liquid-Level-Indicator/dp/B00IIP1ITO/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=liquid+filling+indicator&qid=1591664920&sr=8-2
 - Knife guards are another recommendation to make sure you are staying safe while prepping your meals. These keep your fingers safe. Another option would be to switch to a rocker knife. This way you do not have to get near the blade.
 - Knife/Finger guard: https://www.amazon.com/Daddy-Stainless-cutting-protector-Kitchen/dp/B07L5MWTK2/ref=sr_1_6?crd=2OB62VKPNJJO1&dchild=1&keywords=finger+guards+for+cutting&qid=1591665320&srefix=finger+guard%2Caps%2C237&sr=8-6

- Plate guards are also helpful to prevent food from falling off your plate.
 - https://www.amazon.com/Able-T-Plate-Guard-Made-Pack/dp/B07T4N2WFP/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=plate+guards&qid=1591665353&sr=8-2
- Talking timers and thermometers will keep you on schedule and help you make the perfect meals with a small amount of assistance
 - Timer: <https://www.amazon.com/MAGNIFYING-AIDS-Talking-Timer-Clock/dp/B000256UG6>
 - Thermometer: https://www.thermoworks.com/Talking-Thermometer?gclid=Cj0KCOjww_f2BRC-ARIsAP3zarFptUtVm7osdolF6-Jz2Oz90Jyn7J8Lri3Foth5_C3r711942DATpwaAnSREALw_wcB

Please see below for pictures of all the suggested adaptations! 😊



Fluorescent Light Bulbs



Shades/Sheers



Contrast the colors of food and tools



Bump stickers for the microwave



Bump stickers for the stove



Liquid Filling Indicator



Finger Guard



Plate Guard



Talking Timer

Helpful Services

- Occupational therapy services are very beneficial for patients suffering from low vision. OT is able to work with the individual on compensatory methods and environmental adaptations to allow for them to still be as independent as possible.
- A low vision doctor is a licensed optometrist who would be able to determine the level of visual function an individual has. They are able to prescribe low vision devices, such as magnifiers, to perform daily tasks (Low Vision Professionals, 2020).
- A certified vision rehabilitation therapist (CVRT) is specifically trained to teach people with vision loss how to go about their day in a safe matter by using adaptive methods and assistive technology. They can assist in home management, communication skills, counseling, and much more (Low Vision Professionals, 2020).
- A certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) helps individuals build skills to help them travel independently. They teach them how to use their remaining senses to determine where they are and how to move safely. One skill they teach is how to use public transportation safely (Low Vision Professional, 2020).

Occupational Engagement

- Vision is an ability that most people rely on to get through their day. However, there are also many people who do not rely on their vision and can still do everything they enjoy either independently or with assistance. The adaptations I have listed above will help individuals with low vision effectively use their kitchen with maximum safety. Mobility and preparing meals for oneself are two very important tasks that occur in the kitchen. In order to safely get around the kitchen, I had suggested to adjust the lighting, prevent glares, and make sure counters, cabinets, and appliances have contrasting colors. These adaptations will allow for an individual to use the vision they still have effectively. Preparing meals can be made easier with many different adaptations. This could range from putting colorful bump stickers on appliances and foods used often, to using liquid filling indicators. Both adaptations, and all the ones listed above, provide a smooth transition from one step to the next while preparing a meal.

References:

Lo, D., Desai, A., Henderson-Kalb, J., & Moss M. (2016). Nutrition, occupational performance, and the phenomenology of food in later life. In Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology (Eds.), *Occupational therapy with aging adults* (pp. 169-195). Elsevier.

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