



# Senior Series

*The Ohio  
Department of  
Aging*



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and Ohio State University Extension's "Aging in Ohio" web site at: <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~seniors/>

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## Making Your Kitchen "User Friendly"

Eating a well-balanced diet is important to everyone of all ages. However, as we get older, cooking in the kitchen can present some challenges. Whether you experience arthritis, difficulty reaching things, reduced upper body strength, or vision impairment, there are ways to adapt your kitchen to make it more "user friendly."

Adapting a kitchen to meet your needs does not have to be expensive or time consuming. There are many affordable ways to make your kitchen easier to use. Admittedly, some methods of modifying your kitchen will be more costly than others, however, paying for alterations you can afford is an investment in your health, safety, and continued independence.

Some suggestions include:

- **Plan a place to sit while working in your kitchen**

If standing for long periods of time is painful or you require the assistance of a cane or walker, sit down! If you don't already have a comfortable chair or stool, you can purchase a "kitchen stool" de-

signed to allow you to sit while working in the kitchen. These stools have an adjustable height feature and three widely spaced legs with wheels that lock to give you stability and mobility. (Estimated cost is \$60)

- **Use a trolley cart**

When transporting food from kitchen to table or even from one counter to another, use a trolley cart rather than carrying a tray. Keep this trolley in the corner of the kitchen for easy access. (Estimated cost is \$40)

- **Purchase a "Reacher"**

Priced very reasonably, these long-handled products enable you to reach items on high shelves. The handle is textured for an easy grip and the end can either have a magnet attached to retrieve small metal objects or a claw-like attachment to grab items that are hard to reach. (Estimated cost is \$15)

- **Use a lever handle on your kitchen faucet**

Consider replacing a two-handled faucet with an easier to use single-lever

faucet. Lever faucets do not require gripping or twisting and are therefore much easier to use. (Estimated cost is \$60 to \$100)

- **Easy grip utensils**

A new brand of utensils is on the market, called “OXO Good Grips.™” These products are designed to fit easily into the palm of your hand for better control and comfort. They can be found at any kitchen supply store, housewares department, and in some grocery stores. There are an endless number of items available ranging from basic utensils (i.e., forks, knives, vegetable peelers, spatulas) to cooking items (non-slip mixing bowl, flour sifter) to kitchen appliances (“easy on the wrist” tea kettle). (Estimated cost ranges from \$2 to \$60)

- **Replace cabinet knobs**

Cabinet handles that are small and round can be replaced with larger knobs or U-shaped pulls that are easier to turn. (Estimated cost is \$4 to \$5 per knob)

- **Roll-out shelves**

Consider installing roll-out tray shelves in your lower cupboards to make it easier to retrieve stored items. (Estimated cost for each tray is \$40)

- **Hanging Rack**

An alternative to installing roll-out shelves in your cupboards is to install a wall-rack on which to hang commonly used pots and pans. (Estimated cost is \$40)

- **Remove throw rugs**

Be sure to remove any throw rugs in your kitchen that may cause tripping or

falling. If you cannot part with your decorator rugs, secure them to the floor by using non-skid tape to prevent slipping. (Estimated cost is \$3 to \$10)

- **Move objects**

Consider moving objects you store over the range to another location to avoid burning yourself or your clothing. In addition, store heavy objects on lower shelves or counter tops and place lightweight items on upper shelves.

- **Check your lighting**

Be sure to have good lighting in your kitchen to avoid tripping, cutting, or burning yourself. If possible, install low wattage fluorescent lights or task lighting over work areas.

- **Contact appliance manufacturers**

If you plan to purchase a new kitchen appliance, consider asking about special needs options on appliance design. Some appliance manufacturers have options available to customers with physical or sight limitations, for example, larger knobs or control panels with large print.

Adapting your kitchen to enhance safety, independence, and accessibility increases the likelihood that you will spend time there! Hopefully, spending time in the kitchen will result in the creation of healthy, well-balanced meals and improved nutrition. Regardless of your health limitations, simple modifications can be made that are affordable and reasonable. Begin with a positive attitude about the possibilities available and you may be surprised with the results that you accomplish!

For more information, contact the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) for publications on how to modify your home. Some examples of helpful publications available from the AARP free of charge include:

- *The Do Able Renewable Home: Making Your Home Fit Your Needs* (D12470)
- *Universal Design and Home Modification* (D16691)
- *How Well Does Your Home Meet Your Needs?* (D16427)

## Other Resources

### Books

- Greenstein, D.B. (1997). *Easy Things to Make Things Easy: Simple Do-It-Yourself Home Modifications for Older People and Others With Physical Limitations*. Brookline Books. (Paperback—\$15.95)
- Bakker, R. (1997). *Elderdesign; Designing and Furnishing a Home for Your Later Years*. Penguin Books. (Paperback—\$14.95)
- Peterson, M. (1998). *Universal Kitchen and Bathroom Planning: Design That*

*Adapts to People*. McGraw Hill. (Hardback—\$79.95)

### Web Sites

AARP Universal Design Home Modification Devices:

[www.aarp.org/universalhome/](http://www.aarp.org/universalhome/)

Adaptive Environments Center, Inc.—Universal Design:

[www.adaptenv.org/universal/default.asp](http://www.adaptenv.org/universal/default.asp)

Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University:

[www.design.ncsu.edu/cud](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud)

## References

“*The Perfect Fit: Creative Ideas For A Safe & Livable Home*” (D14823)  
The American Association of Retired Persons, Washington, D.C.

Atecheson, R. (2000, November-December). “Our Old House.” *Modern Maturity*.

AARP Universal Design Home Modification Devices: [www.aarp.org/universalhome/](http://www.aarp.org/universalhome/)

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