Tips to Handle Cooking and Eating a Little Easier

Are you or someone you know dealing with pain or weakness in movement that makes it hard to do activities of daily living such as cooking, handling utensils, or movement in general? Causes of limited mobility may be due to arthritis and musculoskeletal problems, accidental falls, heart conditions, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma, stroke, overexertion and strenuous movements, and osteoporosis and bone or cartilage disorders.

Occupational therapists can evaluate how your condition (or risk for one) is affecting your ability to participate in life and provide ways to overcome any barriers. They may recommend assistive devices and ways to do things easier (such as those presented here) or environmental modifications to your home or apartment to make it safer and to prevent falls and make it easier to get around.

If you want to reduce pressure and discomfort in your hands when holding or working with objects.
- Wrap foam, cloth, or tape around the handles of objects such as knives and pots and pans to cushion the grip.
- Use household and gardening tools with larger, ergonomically designed handles.
- Use tools to make everyday tasks easier such as this jar opener to reduce the stress on finger joints.

An Occupational Therapist can recommend adaptive equipment that will put less stress on your joints and help determine what equipment will work best for you and provide you with training in how to use it.

If you want to reduce pain before, during, and after activities and while sleeping.
- Apply heat to reduce joint stiffness and apply cold to reduce joint pain.
- Elevate and support your arms or legs on pillows when sleeping.

An Occupational Therapist can instruct you in how to use compression garments, heat and cold pads, make custom splints to rest, support, and/or properly position your joints during activities or while sleeping, and instruct you in proper positioning to prevent or minimize deformity.

If you want to continue to do the things that are important to you.
- Separate daily tasks, including leisure activities, into manageable amounts, and take breaks as needed.
- Prioritize the things that are meaningful to you, and make time for them first.

An Occupational Therapist can look at how you do your daily activities and routines, and suggest ways to do them differently to avoid stress on your joints, pain, and reduced energy levels. They can help you engage in community activities such as your ability to comfortably and safely drive your car or suggest other modes of transportation.
Tips for Cooking and Handling Things

** Wear a plain, inexpensive ring on your thumb and use it like a bottle opener for containers of yogurt, sour cream, or other things. Position it under the lid's edge, and lift up with your hand to pop off the top.

** When filling or emptying large pots of water, use a plant stand for transport and a small plastic measuring cup to transfer the water.

** You could buy pre-cut veggies and fruits or use a food processor to slice, shred, and chop.

** If it's tough to stir, use a small, handheld electric blender and whisk instead of a spoon.

** Use a small kitchen funnel to separate egg yolks from the whites. Place the funnel over a glass. To separate the egg, crack the egg into the funnel. The white will slide into the glass, the yolk stays in the funnel.

** Instead of shaking the bottle before opening it; roll it. If your hands are sore, use your forearm and the weight of your body.

** Sometimes there can be trouble opening doors, especially doorknobs. You can replace doorknobs with handles. This allows you to use your elbow and forearm to get the door open. However, there are a few doors that do not have that option, so try the following: tie a pretty ribbon or scarf on the closet bifold door or the refrigerator door. When you cannot pull it open with your hands, hook your arm through the ribbon and use the weight of your body to open the door.

** Store your pots and pans on wall hooks or a pot hanger from the ceiling to eliminate unnecessary bending.

References: WebMD Medical Reference
http://blog.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/
American Occupational Therapy Association - www.OTDA.org
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OFA – Special Cookware and Eating Utensils 7/2017

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments. For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304
Examples of Special Tools to Make Handling Easier

**Easy Grip Tools**

Ergonomic handle can be gripped in either hand. Designed especially for people with weak hands or wrists.

**The Stove Top Pot Holder** keeps pots and pans in place while contents are being stirred. The wire frame holds the handle of a pot or pan, keeping the pan from accidentally turning and causing spills.

**Madagrip Opener** provides a better grip for weak hands. Fits entire hand and offers extra turning power.

This 12 ounce plastic cup has an extra-large base and two large handles.

**High-density polyethylene paring board.** Aluminum nails hold food for peeling and slicing. Corner guards keep bread from sliding when spreading butter or cutting. Four rubber suction feet anchor board securely.

This epoxy covered aluminum rod is for people who cannot grasp or turn the stove knob or reach over the hot pots.

**Dyecem Non-Slip Pads** hold a variety of objects in place: mixing bowls, plates, glasses, office equipment, wheelchair and car cushions. Ideal for one-handed activities. Small pad can be carried in handbag or pocket when eating out.

An 8 ounce **Nosey Cup** provides a steady grip, with its contoured shape and slightly textured surface. A special cut-out for the nose area allows users to drink easily without tipping the head back.

**GripWare Partitioned Scoop Dish** has high dividers, non-skid feet, and separate compartments to keep food from mixing.

**WearEver Grip Right** features comfortable and ergonomic grip handles. Durable aluminum with glass lids for better viewing and nonstick interior for easy food release and clean up.

Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County and Schenectady County Senior and Long Term Care
Additional Tips for Cooking and Eating

When you have less pain and more energy and feel up to cooking, make extra. You can save some in the refrigerator to have within a couple of days or freeze to have when you want it on those lower-energy days. Another example is to measure out fresh herbs in tablespoons or teaspoons, then place them in ice cube trays. Fill the trays with water, milk, or cream. When frozen, place them in clearly marked plastic bags.

Keep healthy frozen meals in stock—those with calories between 250-300, with less than 4 grams of saturated fat and 800 milligrams of sodium, and with at least 3-5 grams of fiber per serving. Add a salad and fruit to round out your meal.

Liquid meals or supplements can be convenient but are relatively expensive. They supply many essential vitamins and minerals, but may lack adequate protein and fiber to be considered a real meal. Plus, being liquid they can leave you hungry. Have them with a slice or two of whole-grain toast or a whole-grain waffle and fruit.

Smoothies, home made or store bought of various combinations of fruits, veggies, dairy and non-dairy products, with or without peanut butter, for weight gain, lose, or for the taste of it, can also provide needed nutrition. There are Smoothie recipe books, recipes on the internet and a couple here for you to try.

**Berry Smooth Smoothie**

1 cup frozen raspberries, strawberries, and/or blueberries  
1 cup cold skim milk  
2 tablespoons honey  
1 banana  
¼ teaspoon vanilla  
6-8 crushed ice cubes  
1 cup plain or fruited low-fat regular or Greek yogurt


Nutrition Information per serving with plain yogurt: 246 calories; 2gm total fat; 1gm saturated fat; 6mg cholesterol; 52gm carbohydrate; 5gm dietary fiber; 8gm protein.

**Pink Cow**

1 cup raspberry yogurt  
1 cup skim milk  
1 fresh peach, peeled and sliced or ½ cup frozen peach slices  
1 teaspoon sugar or 1 packet sweetener

Blend together thoroughly and serve chilled.

Nutrition Information per serving: 173 calories; trace total fat; trace saturated fat; 4mg cholesterol; 33gm carbohydrate; 1gm dietary fiber; 10gm protein.

**Talk to your doctor or an occupational therapist about what types of tools and utensils are best for your particular condition.**

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**Have a nutritional question or concern regarding your food and/or supplement choices?** If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for the dietitian to call you back.