



Aberdeenshire  
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Partnership

# Top Tips for Using your Kitchen



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## **Are you having difficulties in the kitchen?**

### **Is making a hot drink or meal more difficult than it used to be?**

If you answer yes, then it is a good time to think about adjustments that might help. Small changes can make a big difference.

Getting your kitchen right for you can help you stay independent and active for much longer.

Here are our Top Tips. Follow the tips to help you make adjustments that will meet your needs now and in the future, you may need to use some of the tips together to be most effective. The key is to make the most of any remaining vision and use your other senses fully.

## Tip 1

### Colour contrast

Increasing the colour contrast between surfaces and objects to help you see them more clearly.

Ways you can increase colour contrast in the kitchen:

By changing your cutting boards to contrast with the food you are preparing. The orange board with the orange food has very little contrast, however against the darker board the same items show more clearly. Increasing the contrast makes it easier to see when you are cutting and also to see the edge of the board so you can keep the food on the board (see pictures to the right).

***Below are some examples of contrast:***

- By contrasting your plate to the food that is being served e.g. cauliflower cheese on a dark plate, mince on a light-coloured plate. This will make it easier to find the food on the plate.
- Choose your cup/mug to contrast with your tea/coffee i.e. if you have milky tea use a cup with a dark inner colour, if you have black tea choose a cup that is a light colour inside.



- Marking the edges of cupboard doors with a brightly coloured contrasting tape. This helps with avoiding bumping your head on the cupboards when the doors are open. If choosing a new kitchen select soft-closing cupboard doors and drawers to ensure they always return to the closed position to avoid accidents.
- If you are looking to renovate your kitchen, choose counter tops that contrast with the cupboard doors and splashbacks. Having the countertop in a matte finish will also reduce glare. Choose a plain finish to help define objects on the work surface. Designs in the countertop can look like crumbs or marks that can have you repeatedly wiping up things that aren't there.

## Tip 2

### Lighting/Glare

Suitable lighting will differ for each person depending on their sight loss and personal preference. It is important to get a balance of lighting, too much can be as bad as too little.

In the kitchen it is important to have even and consistent lighting over the cooker and worktop surfaces. The picture to the right shows an area of very dull lighting



over the cooker and stronger lighting under the cupboards. This makes it more difficult to prepare food.



***Even lighting can be achieved by:***

Having lights under wall cupboards (see picture above) to provide direct lighting onto the work top. Having a pelmet or lip at the front of the cupboard will help direct the light down rather than into your eyes.

Overhead lighting positioned behind you will create shadows when you are working on counters in the kitchen. It is often best to locate the lights directly over the counters, so the light is onto the task you are working on.

Install vertical or horizontal blinds on windows. These help you adjust the light level if it is too bright and reduce the

glare. They also let you direct the light to where you need it. Consider the colour of the blinds. Light coloured blinds still allow sunlight through. Darker blinds will limit the light from the window more fully.

Use a small, directional task lamp on the counter beside you. This can put light straight onto the task you are working on e.g. preparing vegetables. Choose one that you can angle so the light is not in your face. Make sure cables are not trailing over the cooker.

Torches can be handy for seeing into cupboards or seeing cooker and microwave controls.

You can add battery or mains lights inside cupboards, this can really help where limited natural or overhead lighting reaches into the cupboard.

Be careful with using spotlights. They can be very helpful if directed onto a specific area you are working in, e.g. over the cooker to see into a pan. Unfortunately, they can also create very bright and dark patches (see picture to the right).





### Tip 3

#### Being organised

A place for everything and everything in its place. All items need to go back into their place when they have been used. This is particularly important for people with sight loss.

#### *You can keep organised by:*

- Taking some time to organise your kitchen and get to know where everything is.
- Keeping human food away from animal food.
- Avoiding cross contamination by keeping cleaning products away from food.
- Arranging similar items together, this can be particularly helpful with food items e.g. group soups in one area of the cupboard. In the photo canned goods have been grouped into sections on the shelf - favourite soups, soups, meat products, vegetables and desserts. These items have also been labelled using an audio labelling device called the Penfriend.

## ***Some more ideas for organising in the kitchen:***

- Use baskets for grouping items e.g. vegetables
- Use spice racks with spices arranged alphabetically or by how they are used e.g. sweet spices, herbs.
- When cooking, get everything out that is needed ahead of time, including foods and equipment for the task.
- Encourage everyone to put everything away where it came from.
- If you are redesigning your kitchen, consider options like pull out style storage. These make it easier to sort items in your cupboards. They also allow you to get closer to products and make better use of the room lighting for identifying items.

### **Tip 4**

#### **Remove clutter**



It is easier to work in a kitchen where you have plenty of space on the worktop or table.

Sort and clear utensil drawers. They tend to collect large numbers of items, as seen in the picture on the previous page

- Clear counter tops of all unnecessary items, just have out the items you use regularly.
- Clear away all items that you no longer use to create space and help with ease of finding items you do need.
- Arrange sharp items like knives, with handles towards the front of the drawer or put them into a knife block.
- Don't keep items on the hob when it is not in use. It is easy to forget they are there when you next turn it on.
- Removing clutter also makes cleaning easier.

## Tip 5

### Safety

Safety needs to always be a priority in the kitchen. When you have a sight loss and are dealing with hot surfaces or sharp knives this is even more important. Plan ahead and think about the task to minimise the risks. Remember general kitchen safety tips.

Here are some tips to help keep safe with two common kitchen tasks.

**Ideas for boiling food:** To avoid lifting heavy pans of boiling water when cooking vegetables, try putting your raw vegetables into metal wire baskets (like those used for deep fat frying, as shown in the picture on the right) then into the water in the saucepan.



This will let you lift the basket with the vegetables straight onto a plate and leave the boiling water in the saucepan to cool before pouring into the sink.

Pre-cut, frozen or canned vegetables are available from supermarkets. They can be easier to use and save you from using sharp knives, they are particularly helpful for harder to cut vegetables like onions and turnips.

**Ideas for pouring boiling water:**

Hot water dispenser – these allow you to place your cup under the nozzle (see picture on the right), press the start button and the kettle will boil one cup’s worth of water and put it directly into your cup. There are different models available with features to allow you to choose the cup size for the amount of water needed for your cup.



Place a tray under your cup to catch any overflow or spills. If you choose a tray that has contrasting colour to your cups, it may also help you to see the cup more easily. It can also help to pour your hot drinks over the sink, so any overflow goes into the sink.



Liquid Level Measure (on the left) – These hook onto the rim of your cup, with the prongs inside the cup. When you pour boiling water, or any other liquid, into the cup it will make a sound when the liquid is a couple of centimetres from the top of the cup, so you know your cup is full.

## Tip 6

### Marking equipment

Many items of kitchen equipment have a lot of buttons or settings that can be difficult to see or feel.

Whenever possible, try new kitchen equipment before buying it. Many stores have kitchen equipment on display that you can touch or look at. Avoid controls that have a completely flat surface or only have a visual digital display.

***The following suggestions can also be helpful:***

- Use permanent marker to indicate which socket is being used for which piece of equipment e.g. K for kettle, F for fridge. As shown in the photo on the right.



- Add colourful tape to handles of sharp knives
- Strips of electrical tape can be useful to mark dials
- Use raised bumps or colourful markings to indicate particular settings or buttons on kitchen equipment e.g. microwave, cooker, washing machine. The picture below shows a cooker dial with orange Bumpons. By lining up the Bumpons this dial will be set at 180 degrees.



## Tip 7

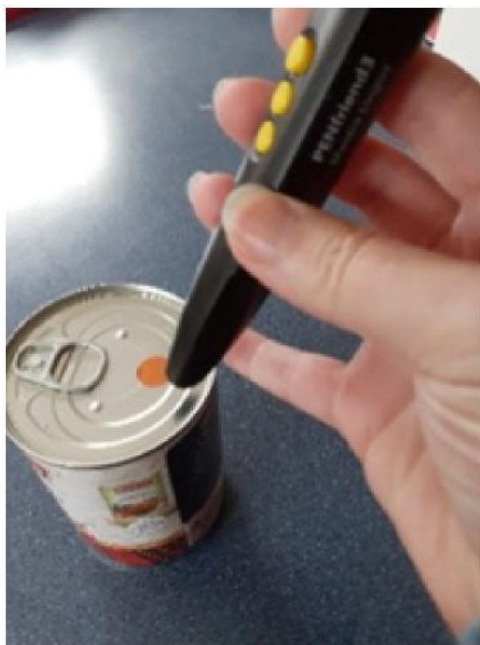
### **Labelling food**

Being able to choose what you want for dinner and then find what you need in the cupboard or fridge is important to everyone.

Here are some ideas with labelling that can help:

- Using a permanent marker pen on a white label and attaching to food items gives you large print labels.
- Group food by use by dates in the fridge, shortest date to the front and longer dates to the back.
- Add a tag to food packets so you can use Braille, large print, or audio labels.
- Common household items can be used to help label foods, e.g. elastic bands (as shown on the right) or children's play magnetic letters can be used on tin cans.
- Many smart phones and tablets have features to magnify information on food. There are also scan and read Apps that read out loud from the print on packaging, two of these are TapTapSee and Seeing AI.





There is special equipment designed for people with sight loss that can also help with labelling. These include items like the Penfriend labeller (shown on top left) and voice recording labels (shown on top right).



## Tip 8

### Timing – microwaves, timers, smart home devices

Timing is critical for many activities in the kitchen. Some microwave and cooker timers have small displays that are difficult to see for people with sight loss.

- Manual wind-up timers are often easy to label and use rather than digital versions (see picture above on the left).
- There are some specialist timers that speak the time as you set them (see picture above on the right).
- Smart home devices, such as Amazon Echo, Google Home or smart phones allow you to ask the device to set a timer for a specific amount of time.

## Tip 9

### Ovens

If you are buying a cooker or hob -

**Dials:** Strong colour contrast and dials that click as they are turned help locate settings. Choose dials at the front of the cooker/hob with clear, easy to see numbers around the dial rather than under glass.

**Rings:** Rings that are clear and obvious to see, when turned off as well as when turned on.

**Door:** Make sure the cooker door has room to open fully to help protect you from burns and allow better access into the cooker. Ensure the cooker is level, so the door doesn't swing around unexpectedly when you have the door open. If the oven door folds down, choose one that slides back in under the oven, such as slide and hide models.

#### ***To make the most of your existing cooker:***

Make sure your oven light works; replacement bulbs are available in many DIY stores.

Putting silicon covers on the front of the oven shelves can prevent burns to your hands or arms. Red ones may also help with seeing the shelves (see picture on the right).



Also choose oven gloves that extend up to your elbow to protect against burns.

There are silicon 'pickles' for induction hobs to mark the position of each ring (see picture on the right). These provide an edge you can feel with the saucepan to know your pan is

correctly placed on the ring. They are also a bright yellow colour that can help with seeing the position.



## Tip 10

### **Alternatives to cookers and hobs**

Microwaves, air fryers, slow cookers

#### ***If you are buying new:***

- Ensure the dials/buttons are distinctive to see and feel, with good colour contrast. Choose devices that are easy to use, with not many buttons.
- Think about what you will use the device for e.g. pre-cooked meals from the fridge. Many devices have a lot of functions that you won't need and can make them confusing to use.
- Check how to clean the device. Be particularly careful to avoid devices that have sharp edges of areas you need to clean.

- Check how you take cooked food out of the device, some need you to find a small handle to lift baskets clear. This can be difficult with a sight loss. Remember things may be very hot when you are taking food out, you need to be sure you can find handles easily.
- Think about which way the door opens for the device, so you are taking items out and straight onto the counter rather than around the door.
- If at all possible, try the device before buying. If you know someone else who has a device, see if you can try theirs. Once you have new equipment spend some time getting used to the controls and the layout. Check through how to line up any sections that may be removed for cleaning so you can get it together again.
- Talking versions of some kitchen equipment e.g. microwaves, induction hobs and air fryers are available from some specialist suppliers. Make sure you choose one with a clear voice that you can hear easily.
- Many microwaves with buttons have an option that allows you to press one button to give 30 seconds or 1 minute at a time. This allows you to count the number of minutes by the number of presses you make.

- Microwaves or other devices with dials can often be marked with raised bumps. This lets you line up the dial with the bump for the number of minutes you need.
- Brightly coloured tape can be used to mark the position of buttons. Marking the start and stop buttons with arrows and squares can also help with identifying the right place to press. As shown in the pictures on this page



Making simple adjustments can make a big difference to your independence and ability to do various tasks.

The Rehabilitation Workers with Aberdeenshire Council Visual Impairment Team are able to help with suggestions and strategies for managing tasks in your kitchen.

Please feel free to get in touch with the Visual Impairment Team

Phone **01467 536700** or

Email [visualimpairment@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:visualimpairment@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

If you need assistance due to other health conditions you can refer yourself for an Occupational Therapy assessment by calling the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care contact centre on **03456 08 12 06**.

If you purchase a product due to a medical need or if you a physical disability (including sight loss), then VAT exemption may be available. VAT relief forms are available on the UK Government website and are called Eligibility Declarations by a disabled person for VAT relief using the following webpage address: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)