



Cooking and Eating With Low Vision

Julie Garden-Robinson, Ph.D., R.D., L.R.D., Food and Nutrition Specialist

Sherri Stastny, Ph.D., R.D., C.S.S.D., L.R.D., Associate Professor, Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences

Casey Kjera, R.D., Program Assistant (former)

Krystle McNeal, R.D., Program Assistant (former)

Challenges of Low Vision

Imagine shopping for foods without the ability to compare prices, visually check produce for freshness, or even safely travel to and from the grocery store. Envision coming home with groceries but not being able to see inside the refrigerator or pantry clearly enough to store the foods. Then think about the challenge of preparing a meal with low vision, from finding a food in the pantry to setting the oven timer. Suddenly cooking seems like quite a daunting task!

Low vision affects all aspects of life, especially the ability to shop, cook and eat. Even a seemingly simple activity such as making a sandwich can become a monumental task and a barrier to preparing foods independently. Thus, many with low vision eat very few fruits and vegetables because of the preparation that's required before eating them and instead will rely on processed foods.

Eating the majority of meals at restaurants can become the norm for many people with low vision because it saves the time and stress of shopping and cooking. As a result, those with low vision have a high risk of becoming overweight or obese.

Top 10 Low Vision Cooking Challenges

1. Accessing readable recipes
2. Organizing and finding kitchen items
3. Checking food freshness
4. Chopping/cutting
5. Measuring small amounts of liquids
6. Setting dials on stovetop or oven
7. Handling hot food and hot stove (without burning)
8. Cooking multiple foods at once
9. Determining doneness
10. Extra time need to cook

Education Needs

Cooking and even shopping for foods can be difficult for those with low vision, so educators need to provide tips that make shopping, cooking and eating easier. Because many people with low vision tend to eat out, educators also should provide advice for choosing healthful options at restaurants and more healthful prepackaged foods at grocery stores, and learning new cooking skills to cope with vision loss.



Shopping Tips

- Plan ahead before shopping, making grocery lists or even menus for a week at a time.
- Ask grocery clerks to help in choosing products, or ask the butcher to cut meats at the counter, saving on preparation time at home.
- When choosing produce, use other senses such as touch and smell. For example, feel the skin of oranges for thinness.
- Find precut options for fresh produce, such as pineapple, strawberries, broccoli and bagged salad greens. Some vegetables such as onions also may be available frozen and diced.
- Try online shopping or ask about other services, such as personal shoppers or ordering groceries by phone.

Cooking Tips

- Limit glare in the kitchen or food prep areas. Use gooseneck lamps to provide more light and blinds over kitchen windows that may emit glare. Replace shiny appliances and surfaces.
- Use contrasting colors when measuring or pouring. For example, measure dark brown sugar in a white measuring cup.
- Wear oven mitts that cover up to the elbow.
- Try marking commonly used temperatures on oven and microwave settings with small dots of brightly colored craft paint.
- When using a cutting board, use colored boards that contrast with the food being cut. For example, cut a dark red apple on a white cutting board.
- Use any adaptive tool that is found to be helpful. Each person will have preferences for different tools; one item may not be helpful for everybody.

Healthier Processed Food Options

- Precut and packaged produce
- Frozen fruits and vegetables
- Low-sodium canned foods
- Nutritionally balanced frozen meals
- Frozen “steamable” vegetables or meals

Adaptive Kitchen Tools for Low Vision

Specialized kitchen gadgets created for those with low vision are available online. Many of these products are specifically intended for those with low vision, and others are simply clever kitchen gadgets that might be helpful for anybody.

Examples of products that may be helpful for people with low vision:

- “Talking” thermometers, kitchen scales or microwaves
- Audible screen readers for more accessible recipes
- Large-letter labels (for marking and identifying products)
- Bold print, brightly colored measuring cups and spoons
- Cooking utensils or knives with brightly colored handles
- Food chopper or palm peeler
- Brightly colored cutting boards

Many of these items can be purchased through the websites listed below.



For More Information

See a qualified occupational therapist (OT) to receive coaching. OT coaching should occur as soon as vision becomes difficult. Ask your doctor about an OT referral.

Resources

These websites have additional low-vision cooking tips and adaptive technology.

Many companies sell assistive items for those with visual impairment. This listing is for educational purposes only and is not intended as an endorsement.

www.Lowvisionchef.com

(utensils for vision-impaired)

www.shoplowvision.com

(variety of items for those with visual impairment)

www.visionaware.org

(resources and support for those with vision loss)

<http://Assistivetech.net>

(National Public Website on Assistive Technology)

The NDSU Extension Service does not endorse commercial products or companies even though reference may be made to tradenames, trademarks or service names.

NDSU encourages you to use and share this content, but please do so under the conditions of our Creative Commons license. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt this work as long as you give full attribution, don't use the work for commercial purposes and share your resulting work similarly. For more information, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons.

For more information on this and other topics, see www.ag.ndsu.edu

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. North Dakota State University does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or status as a U.S. veteran. Direct inquiries to the Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach, 205 Old Main, (701) 231-7708. This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, (701) 231-7881.