

Hack your kitchen



Adapt your workspace to your symptoms, and start preparing healthy meals again.

by Vicky Uhland

You know the importance of good nutrition. But some days, you may feel too fatigued to cook a healthy meal. Or mobility, strength, vision or cognition issues related to multiple sclerosis may hinder any culinary ambitions beyond heating up a frozen dinner in a microwave.

While it would be ideal if you could have a state-of-the-art kitchen designed to accommodate your specific symptoms, that's not always logistically or financially possible. But the good news is that there are a variety of simple, inexpensive things you can do within your existing kitchen to make preparing a nutritious and tasty meal easier, safer and more pleasurable.

We asked three experts for their favorite cost-effective tips on how to make kitchens more user-friendly for people with MS. You'll want to identify a handy person in your support network to implement some of these suggestions.

Our experts



Kara Knetzer is an occupational therapist with Missouri Baptist Medical Center in St. Louis.



Susan Bachner, of Lexington, KY, is an occupational therapist and certified home environmental modifications consultant.



Carl Tapp, a Rogers, Arkansas, resident living with primary-progressive MS, recently built an entirely accessible home.

Photos courtesy of Kara Knetzer, Susan Bachner and Carl Tapp

Featured Tips

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Mobility issues



- In front of the sink or countertops that you use frequently, ask a handy person to remove a lower cabinet door and any shelves inside. This makes space for your knees and allows you to pull a stool or wheelchair right up to the area. If you don't like the look of open cabinets, use a colorful piece of fabric as a curtain.
- Replace a few of the top shelves in your lower cabinets with pullout shelves or wire baskets. Home repair stores sell do-it-yourself kits for about \$40 to \$50 per shelf. Store the items you use most in your new pullouts.
- If it's not built in, place your microwave in a lower cabinet, on a countertop or on a short stand so it's easily accessible. You can also put an electric frying pan on a lower table nearby so you don't have to use the stove.
- Swap out knob-shaped faucet handles for long levered handles that can be operated with reachers or grabbers.

Limited dexterity



Photo courtesy of Patterson Medical

- Replace hard-to-grip cabinet knobs with handles. Large, horseshoe-style handles are easiest to grab.

- Choose utensils with bigger handles because they're easier to control. You can make your own by attaching removable foam rubber grips, which are available at most medical supply stores and at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).
- Use textured shelf paper, sold at kitchen supply and big-box stores, to keep servingware, glasses, and pots and pans from sliding out of cabinets.
- Consider using a rocker knife, with the handle on top and the knife on the bottom. It's safer, and you don't need a second hand to stabilize the food you're cutting. These knives are available at many kitchen stores. [Pattersonmedical.com](https://www.pattersonmedical.com) also sells cut-resistant gloves you can wear while using kitchen knives.

Reduced upper-body strength

- Place a heat-resistant mat on the countertop next to your stove so you can slide heavy pans off the burner rather than lift them. Mat brands such as RangeKleen and Colortrak are available at big-box stores or online.
- Install slow-close hardware on your drawers or cabinet doors to make them easier to open and shut. Kits are available at home repair stores or online, and range from \$5 to \$20 per drawer or door.

Fatigue

- Designate one section of a countertop or table as a daily use area, and place items that you frequently use, like a coffeepot or can opener, within easy reaching distance. Attach removable plastic hooks (available in grocery or big-box stores) on the sides of a nearby cabinet to hang potholders or your favorite lightweight frying pan.
- Keep a chair or stool in the kitchen so you can sit at a table or island while you're doing meal prep, rather than standing in front of a countertop. You can find safe, adjustable-height stools at medical supply stores.

Vision issues



- Put brightly colored painter's tape (available anywhere paint is sold) on the edge of countertops in your prep area so you can see and feel when items are in danger of

falling over the edge.

- Place a lamp on the back of a countertop or table for extra task illumination.

Cognition issues

- Read the entire recipe before you start the prep work, and gather the ingredients and any utensils, bowls or pans you will need before you start. This helps eliminate the frustration or fear that can be associated with following a new recipe.

Vicky Uhland is a Lafayette, Colorado-based freelance writer and editor.

Download the Society's brochure, [At Home with MS: Adapting Your Environment](#).

Call an MS Navigator at 1-800-344-4867 for referrals to occupational therapists who can assist with home assessments and modifications.