

Adaptive cutlery, crockery and cups can offer a child or adult a range of solutions to help them eat and drink. Many people may experience difficulties with eating and drinking due to a wide range of conditions such as a reduced grip, restricted movement, lack of muscle control or sensory issues. Everyone is different so it is important to match their personal needs to the right equipment and think about what items would be most useful to them as well as their carers. The right equipment can make eating and drinking easier and allow a person to achieve more independence. In view of this, seeking professional advice from an occupational therapist or speech and language therapist is recommended. They will be able to give advice on techniques to help with eating and drinking as well as suggest possible equipment to help. A speech and language therapist in particular will be able to identify and help if there are problems caused by difficulties with chewing and swallowing food or drink. Your doctor, local health service or hospital will be able refer you to an occupational or speech and language therapist.



### Drinking

Difficulty with drinking may be due to a range of physical conditions, including poor muscle control, reduced grip, sight problems, lack of sensation in the hands and sensory problems. There are a variety of cups designs available, which come in a range of different shapes and sizes. Ridged sides for example can help with grip while clear cups enable the user to check the level of the drink left in the cup - especially useful as some people can find a full cup heavy. Think about what you need in a cup: does it need to be dishwasher proof? can it be used in the microwave? does it need to be strong? What shape or size would be best?

**Two handed cups:** Two handed cups are helpful if a person has a reduced grip, lack of muscle control or poor hand sensation. Two handed cups allow the cup to be grasped in both hands, giving more control with drinking. It is easier to sip liquids while the weight of the cup is distributed evenly in both hands. Some cups have larger handles, again making the cup easier to grasp.

**Cups with spouts or teats:** these can help people who have difficulty drinking by controlling the flow of the liquid to the mouth. Especially helpful if a person has weak muscles around the mouth and lips which makes drinking from a cup rim hard. Cups with lids and spouts can also prevent spills as the cup is raised to the mouth as well as controlling the flow of liquid.

**Angled cups:** These are very helpful if a person cannot raise their head or has a lack of mobility in the neck. The angle of the cup means that it does not have to be tipped so far up in order for the person to drink. These, whether combined with a lid with a spout or used on their own enable the user or their carers to control the flow of liquid to the mouth without the need to raise their head or shoulders.

**Flexible cups/cutaway cups:** These cups are made of a flexible material which allows the cup to be squeezed into a spout or shaped to allow the gentle flow of liquid into the mouth. Ideal for a person with limited mobility, they also often have a cutaway back. The cutaway at the back means that the nose is clear of the cup when the cup is raised for drinking. Available in a range of sizes.

**Straws:** Straws allow people to drink without the need to raise up a cup. Some cups are available with lids that can accommodate a straw while others may have a built in straw integral to the cups design. Again these can help those with limited mobility or neck control as well as those who have difficulty drinking from the rim of a cup.

**Cups with valves:** cups with valves are good for people who are drinking from a reclining position. The drink can be sipped from anywhere around the rim of the cup, the flow of liquid controlled by the sip action of the users. The valve also means the cup can be spill proof, making it ideal for night time use.

**Brightly coloured cups or cups with bright lids:** these can help a person with limited vision focus on and locate their cup.



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## Finding Solutions Changing Lives



### Cutlery

Some people find standard cutlery difficult to use. They may have a weak grip, stiffness in their joints and hands, muscle spasms, a lack of sensation in the hands or the use of only one hand for instance. Using different sized cutlery or cutlery which has been adapted can make feeding easier and encourage independent eating. Changing the grip on the cutlery by adding foam tubing or a hand strap can assist those with a painful or weak grip, while cutlery with moulded/shaped handles can also make holding the cutlery more comfortable. For others who may have limited mobility or stiff limbs angled cutlery can be very beneficial. Again the advice of a health professional should be sought, as they can suggest solutions tailored to suit the individual child.

**Cutlery with moulded handles:** available in adult or child sizes these have moulded plastic handles designed to fit the hand comfortably. Some designs have contoured dimples to fit the thumb and a raised hilt to stop the fingers slipping forward toward the head of the cutlery.

**Cutlery with large grips:** by increasing the width of the cutlery handle it becomes easier and less painful to hold for those with a weak grip or poor sensation in the hands. The fingers do not need to wrap around the whole handle to maintain a grip.

**Angled cutlery:** angled cutlery is available in a range of different designs. The head is set at an angle to the handle. The angle allows the food to be brought up to the mouth with less movement from the hands or arms. These come in either left handed or right handed versions and may be brought as a set or individually.

**Coated or plastic cutlery:** If a person is inclined to bite on their cutlery or is likely to bash the head of the cutlery against their mouth when feeding, coated or plastic spoons can help protect the teeth from damage. Helpful if the person has a strong bite reflex.

**Utensil holder/hand strap:** these aids hold the cutlery in a strap which attaches around the users hand, giving them much more stability and grip.

**Weighted Cutlery:** people with unsteady hands or spasms can find cutlery with more weight easier to use as the extra weight can help suppress their unwanted movements.

### Crockery

There are different type of plates and bowls designed to make feeding easier. These include weighted plates which won't slip so easily and plates with non slip bases. There are also plates and bowls which have raised sides which make pushing the food onto a fork or spoon less difficult. While non slip mats can stop plates and dishes slipping away from the person as they eat.

**Scoop dishes:** dishes with raised edge at one side help the person push the food to the back of the plate and on to a fork or spoon. The higher side prevents the food being pushed off the plate.

Higher sided plates: plates with high straight sides and broad rims will stop food from falling off the dish.

**Coloured plates:** bright colours which contrast the table and surroundings as well as the food on the plate can help those with a visual impairment.

**Partitioned dishes:** foods can be separated into different compartments; the high sides again make pushing the food onto the cutlery easier.

**Keep warm dishes/Insulated bowls:** some crockery is available with a water reservoir in them which allows hot water to be added. This will keep the food on the dish warmer for longer. This is useful if a person needs more time to finish their meal. Alternatively they can be used with cold water to keep food such as ice cream cooler.

**Non slip placemats:** non slip placemats such as the Dycem version have a tacky textured surface on to which a plate or dish can be placed during meal times. This will prevent the plate from being pushed away or slipping across the table while the person eats.



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