

# Independent Living Assistance

## Household appliances



Electrical appliances are used to assist in a range of tasks around the home. When selecting an electrical appliance, it is important to consider that some will be easier to operate and can include features that may be of benefit to specific user needs.

### General tips

- For people experiencing painful or weak hands and wrists or difficulties with fine motor movements, look for appliances that have large comfortable handles to hold, and controls that are easy to manipulate. For some people, push buttons requiring little pressure may be easier to operate than turning control knobs. Others might prefer large dials which are easy to grasp and are not recessed.
- For people with a visual impairment, select appliances that have large clear print or buttons which provide audible feedback. Consider placing fluorescent or textured markings to highlight commonly used temperatures or settings. Use colours that contrast to each other as well as to the background. Markings can include adhesive bump indicators, brightly coloured tags, paint pens or nail polish.
- Appliances that have clear visual representations, such as light sequences may be more suitable for users with a hearing impairment.
- Consider appliances that have the ability to pre-program settings, require minimal steps, and automatically switch off if unused or after a period of time.
- When selecting appliances for wheelchair users, it is important to consider accessibility. Look at the location of appliances, for example is there adequate room for the user to wheel up underneath or alongside the appliance?

- Consider lightweight appliances which require minimal effort to assemble and change parts. Some appliances may feature self-cleaning functions.

### Kitchen appliances

#### Electric kettles

Select a kettle which has a clear water level indicator or use a marker to highlight commonly used levels to prevent over/under filling. Some kettles will not boil unless filled with a minimum amount of water.

For those with limited upper limb strength, look for kettles with lids which are easy to open or a large spout to pour water into.

Ensure the kettle has a comfortable handle with enough space between the handle and the surface of the kettle body to allow the person to grasp the handle and not burn their hand on the hot kettle surface.

Kettle tippers allow the kettle to be tipped and water to be poured without the kettle being lifted. There are also frames that fit the kettle you own that allow the same action.

Instead of carrying the kettle to the tap for filling, consider using a small jug and carrying this to the kettle. Alternatively, consider using a small urn with a lever mechanism for pouring water or a travel kettle which are smaller and lighter in weight and might be more manageable.

#### Rice cookers

Rice cookers can be an effective alternative to cooking rice-based dishes on a stove top. For users who fatigue easily, whole meals can be cooked in the one dish reducing the number of items required for cleaning and lifting. The central container is lightweight for easy removal and serving and the decreased need for constant stirring can reduce the risk of steam scalding and assist in energy conservation.

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Rice cookers automatically switch from a cooking to warming function which may be beneficial for users with poor memory or concentration.

Consider using other "one pot set and leave" type appliances like slow cookers, multicookers and Thermomix machines.

#### Microwaves

Using a microwave for cooking, defrosting and reheating may be a simpler alternative than using a conventional oven or stove top.

Study the mechanism for opening the door and consider whether pulling open the door or pushing a release button is easier. Look for a microwave that has a lightweight, removable turntable for easy cleaning.

It is important to position the microwave at bench top level to promote safety when transferring items to and from the microwave. A pull-out shelf is available which sits under a microwave and can be pulled out to provide an additional heat resistant bench space in front of a microwave for preparation and stirring.

#### Electric can openers

Electric can openers may benefit users who experience arthritis or have difficulty with fine motor movements, because they require less effort to operate than manual versions. Battery operated or mains powered options are available.

#### Electric knives

Electric knives may reduce the amount of effort required to cut certain foods. Consider the style of handle for a comfortable grip. A "D" shaped handle may be easier to hold. Choose an electric knife that is easy to assemble and disassemble.

It is important to remember that electric knives need to be used carefully and may pose a safety risk to individuals experiencing cognitive difficulties.

#### Refrigerators and freezers

Consider a side-by-side refrigerator and freezer for increased accessibility. Ensure door handles are positioned at an accessible height and temperature controls are located near the front for easy access. Consider a freezer with pull out draws to minimise reaching and position heavier items at an accessible height range.

Narrower doors may be easier to open for users in a wheelchair. When possible, refrigerator and freezer doors should swing back a full 180 degrees when open to allow the user to position themselves more closely to the shelves.

If forgetting to close the door is an issue look for an audible alarm which sounds if the door is not shut within a specific time frame.

#### Ovens

Consider installing an oven which features glass doors that are cool to touch. Oven guards can be purchased to provide a protective cover to place over the oven front to act as a heat barrier and prevent burns and scalding.

For accessibility, consider an oven which is separate from the stove and sits on a bench top or at a height which is accessible to the user. Side opening doors will allow the user to get closer to the oven than a front opening door. The controls on these models are often easier to locate. Consider a shelf which sits below the oven and which can be pulled out to assist with transferring and stirring.

#### Stoves

Controls which are located to the front or side of the stove are more accessible and minimise the need to reach over hot plates.

Consider installing an induction cooktop which features a completely flat surface that only heats up within the surface area of the pan and not the cook top itself. This reduces the amount of lifting required and minimises the risk of accidental burns. Be aware that not all cookware is compatible with this type of cooktop.

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Consider a separate benchtop stove with open space underneath to allow wheelchair users or those using a kitchen stool to access the elements.

For users with visual impairment, choose stoves that have hot plates which contrast to the surface of the stove top, for example black hot plates on a white stove.

For users with poor concentration or memory, isolation switches can be fitted to stoves and pre-programmed to turn off either gas or electricity after a pre-set period, for example twenty minutes. An audible reminder alarm sounds when the time period is nearly up, providing opportunity for the user to press a button to continue cooking. Gas leak indicators can be installed to sense if the gas is turned on but not ignited.

#### Dishwashers

Consider installing a dish drawer dishwasher which may make stacking and emptying easier and reduce the need for bending and reaching.

Positioning a dishwasher at an open end of a counter will allow a wheelchair user to pull alongside the unit and reach the racks inside.

Ensure compartments for adding detergents are easy to access.

### Laundry appliances

#### Iron

Look for an iron that features an automatic cut-off or audible alarm if it falls over or is not used for an extended period of time. Compare the different weights of irons and ensure the handle and controls are comfortable to hold and operate.

Travel irons can be lighter and smaller in size. Temperature controls located above the handle may be easier to operate over those which are located on the body of the iron. An iron that is capable of using steam may increase the effectiveness of ironing and reduce the amount of time and effort required.

#### Washing machine

Front load washing machines elevated off the floor on a stand may be more accessible to users, because they reduce the need to bend into the machine. Ensure the controls are located at the front of the washing machine for easy access.

#### Clothes dryer

Ensure the dryer is mounted at a practical height to reduce the amount of bending or reaching required to access controls, to open the door and to place/remove clothing. Consider the location of the filter—whether it is at the back or the front and take note of the direction the door swings to make sure it does not block access.

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#### Vacuum cleaner

Look for a lightweight vacuum cleaner which has a telescopic wand that allows you to adjust the length according to user height. Some vacuum cleaners may have on/off controls located on the wand to reduce the amount of bending required. For small messes, try a small rechargeable hand-held vacuum, dust buster or carpet cleaner.

### Further information and support

An occupational therapist can advise you about the appliances that best suit your needs.

Through **My Aged Care** it is possible for older people to access Australian Government-subsidised services including a home assessment by an occupational therapist. To check eligibility and apply for an assessment, call 1800 200 422 or visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au/](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au/).

People under the age of 65 with a permanent disability who are **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** participants and have Assistive Technology or Consumables funding approval may be eligible for daily living aids if these items are deemed necessary. The

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funding doesn't cover the purchase of standard appliances.

**Catalyst Foundation** (including Seniors Information Service) can help with sourcing useful resources and locating equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776 or email [information@catalystfoundation.com.au](mailto:information@catalystfoundation.com.au).

*The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.*

*Catalyst Foundation is supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Visit the website [www.sa.health.gov.au](http://www.sa.health.gov.au) for more information. Although funding for this publication has been provided by the Australian Government, the material contained herein does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Australian Government.*

**Reviewed March 2024**