

Fact Sheet 14

Safe Cooking Strategies for People with Epilepsy

by Stephanie Hunter

Safety while cooking

The kitchen, with its ovens, burners, and sharp knives is a potentially hazardous area. Adjustments in methods of food preparation, cooking, and clean-up will make the kitchen safer for people with seizures. For example, some people with occasional complex partial seizures choose to complete all their food preparation with food processors and choppers instead of knives, or purchase pre-cut or already prepared meals or meal components. The microwave oven and slow cookers are chosen as safe and efficient methods of cooking instead of using the oven or stove top.

Tips for ease of cooking

- Fresh vegetables pre-cut in packs
- Ask the butcher at the supermarket for meat or fish to be cut to your requirements
- Use an electric steamer for rice and vegetables
- Sauces in packets, cans and jars
- Sit down while doing food preparation
- Use a rubber mat under plates, bowls, chopping boards
- Wear an apron when cooking
- Don't cook when you're tired. Have pre-made meals in the freezer.
- Use plastic utensils and containers when preparing food
- Slide hot food containers along the bench rather than pick them up.
- Make the most of slow cookers
- Consider using an electric frying pan, which is more stable, rather than a frying pan on the stove
- Consider using a smaller bench top oven. These have a timer which will turn the oven off after a pre-set time.

Using a microwave

- Microwave ovens can be safer than conventional ovens as they turn off automatically after the cooking time has ended. This means there is less chance of food burning or a fire starting if you leave it unattended. Microwaves don't get hot, which means they are less likely to cause burns if touched.

- Special microwave-safe dishes and containers should not get too hot to the touch so you are less likely to burn yourself when taking food out of the microwave.
- Drinks can also be heated in a microwave. Stirring the drink will disperse any uneven 'hot spots' which could burn your mouth.

Making hot drinks

- Cordless kettles that switch off automatically and have a lid that 'locks' shut can help prevent scalds.
- Using a kettle cradle means you don't have to lift the kettle to pour the water.
- Cups with plastic lids (commuter mugs) can protect you if you spill a hot drink during a seizure

Cooking on the stove top and in the oven

- Using a cooking basket inside a pot means you can lift the basket out after cooking and the hot water drains back into the pan. Then you can turn off the element and empty the pot later when the liquid is cool.
- Using a trolley to transfer food from the oven or cook top to the table means that you don't have to carry hot or heavy dishes
- Always wear oven mitts - the longer the better - when removing hot items from the microwave or oven
- Turning saucepan handles to the side can help prevent pans being knocked off the cooker
- Using rings or burners at the back of the hob or grilling food rather than frying it can be safer. Use long tongs to stay back from the heat.
- Using a gas or ceramic hob means that heat can be turned off quickly
- Fitting a cooker guard around the front of the stove top means that the rings or burners are harder to touch by accident.
- Using a low-level grill instead of an eye level grill can help reduce the risk of injuring your face if you have a seizure
- Having a heat-resistant work surface means you can slide heavy pans across the work surface rather than lifting them

Safeguard your kitchen

- Use oven mitts and cook only on rear burners
- If possible, use an electric stove, so there is no open flame
- Cooking in a microwave or slow cooker can be the safest options
- Ensure that your hot water is at a suitable temperature
- Wear rubber gloves when washing the dishes
- Use plastic containers rather than glass when possible

Safety while eating

- Make sure that friends, family, caregivers know basic first-aid such as the Heimlich manoeuvre to assist someone who is choking
- Always eat sitting upright
- Use chairs with arm-rests to prevent falls
- Use nonskid surfaces under plates and cups to avoid spills
- Use a bowl or dish if coordination is a problem
- Use a cup with a lid and spout (e.g. commuter cup) for warm liquids

We thank Stephanie Hunter for providing this fact sheet.

Disclaimer: this fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult your doctor or other health professional for advice regarding your epilepsy.