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B-1254



**Texas
Agricultural
Extension
Service**

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**ABILITY
NOT
DISABILITY**

Wheelchairs



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ABILITY — NOT DISABILITY: WHEELCHAIRS

For the homemaker in a wheelchair, the key to running a home well is to have an efficient and usable kitchen and laundry area. Not everyone can build a new kitchen, but alterations can make chores easier.

Rearranging the Kitchen

All counters, sinks and cooking surfaces should be lowered to wheelchair level. For most people, 31 inches, is a height which permits most tasks to be done easily, except for heavy mixing and chopping. Secondly, wheelchair arms 29 inches high require 29½ inches from the floor to the bottom surface to move underneath a worktop. Since most counters are about 1½ inches thick, the upper surface can be no lower than 31 inches.

Counters. Counters should be open underneath so the person can get close enough to wash dishes. This area can be left completely open, or bi-fold doors that move out of the way can be used to hide the pipes.

Sinks. Standard sinks are available with drains at the back so that pipes are out of the way. A garbage disposal eliminates the need to transfer garbage.



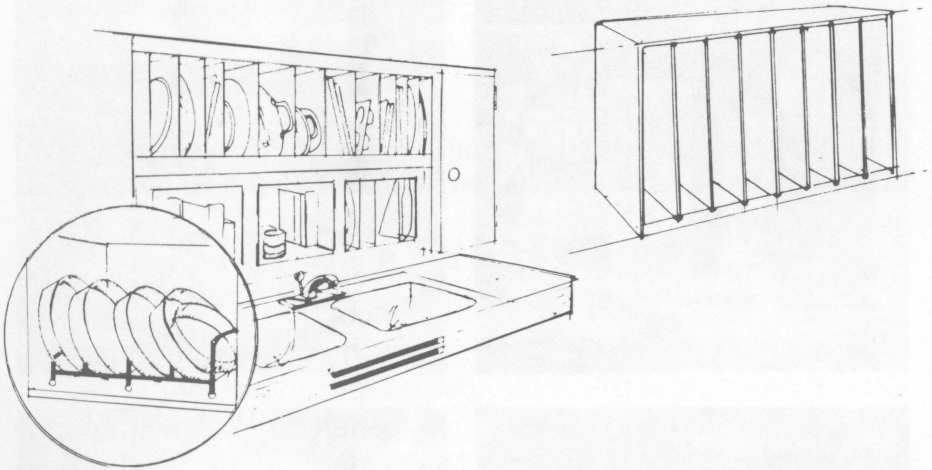
A drop-in sink with flat edges that merge into the countertop can be installed at any height required. A free-standing sink can be lowered to 31 inches by cutting the legs or reconstructing the cabinetry. In both cases a plumber will need to rearrange the drain and water intake connections.

Faucets. Kitchen faucets should be easy to operate without stretching or exerting additional energy. Lever-type faucets are less difficult than faucets with hot and cold water knobs.

Oven. Ovens should be a convenient height. Ovens are available with doors that swing up from the bottom and out of the way of the wheelchair. With this type, a pull-out shelf directly under the oven is convenient for setting down pans. A counter at the side of the oven is also useful.



Range. The range or surface unit also should be open underneath to permit the homemaker to get close. The controls should be within reach along the side or the front.



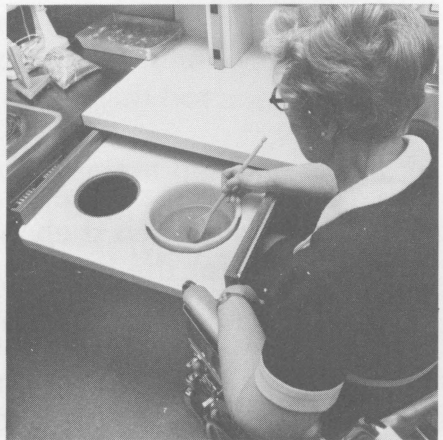
Open shelving and vertical files. Upper cupboards may be replaced with open shelving and vertical files that are the correct height for the homemaker's reach.

Vertical files are made by inserting pieces of plywood or fiberboard into grooves in the top and bottom shelves, or narrow strips may be nailed on to form grooves. Dividers can be moved to any width to accommodate all sizes of baking pans or kettles.

Dividers also can be placed inside a cupboard, or a vertical divider can be built as a box and slipped into a cupboard if the shelves cannot be used.

Dividers can be made from aluminum wire or clothes hanger wire placed in holes drilled into a piece of plywood. This works well for lightweight pans. The 2-inch and 5-inch wire loops are spaced at any distance. Placing them at an angle permits the storage of larger pans on a narrow shelf. Aluminum wire does not rust or require painting.

Lazy Susans. Lazy Susans bring all boxes and bottles within view and reach. They can be built into corner cupboards or purchased at hardware stores and slipped into existing cupboards.



Pull-out drawers. Some homemakers prefer drawers instead of cupboards because they come out and contents are not hidden from view or reach. Pull-out drawers are inexpensive at most hardware stores. One homemaker improvised by using cut-down cartons.

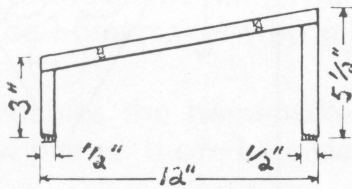
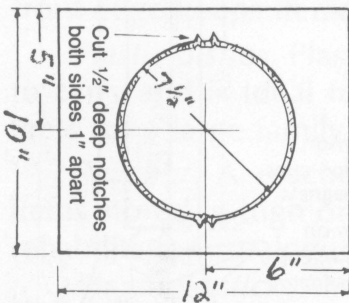
Pull-out boards and bowl holders. Pull-out boards at the counter extend space and often can be pulled over the knees to make a good work area. The pull-out board can contain several size openings for holding bowls. The holder grips the

bowl so it does not have to be held while stirring. This is especially good for someone with weak arms and hands.

A holder also can be made on a stand or on a flat board that fits over a drawer. Notches hold the bowl on its side while the contents are scraped out. Any bowl with a rim wide enough to catch firmly into the notches is satisfactory. Unbreakable plastic or stainless steel is lighter than glass or china and usually has a better rim.

Directions:

Cut the plywood to the diagram measurements and nail together. The bowl opening may need to be changed to fit the size of the bowl. Glue the rubber weather stripping around the bowl opening and across the lower edges of the frame to prevent the holder from slipping during use.



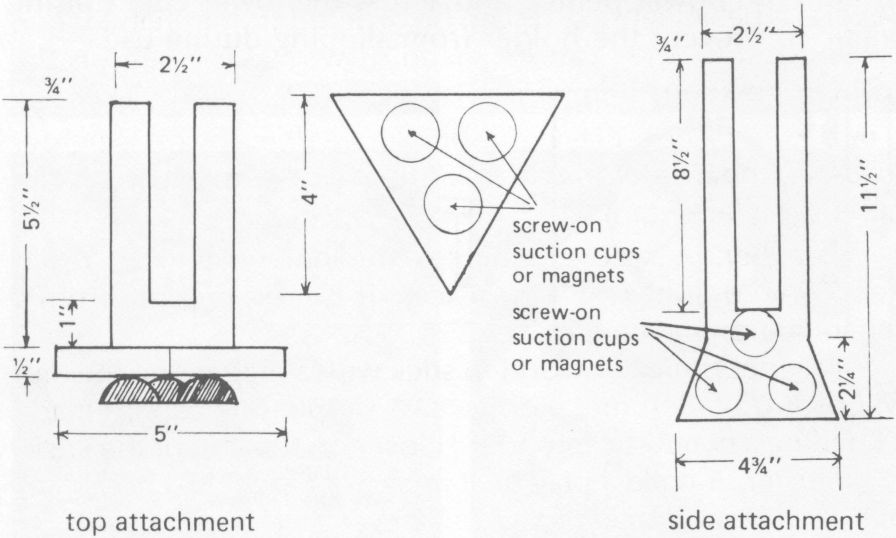
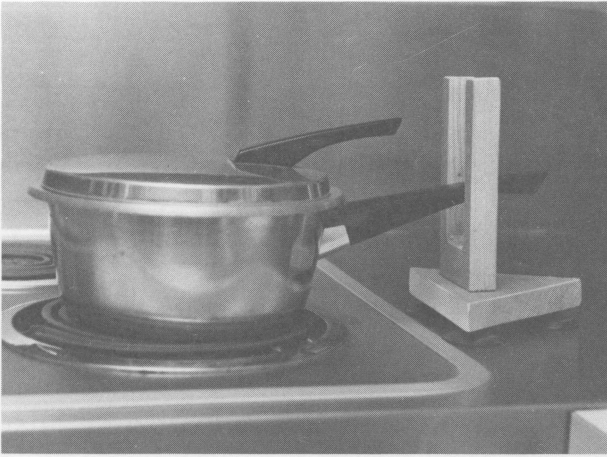
MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Pieces of 1/2-inch thick plywood
- Nails
- Sponge rubber stripping (weather stripping)
3/8 inch wide and 5/16 inch thick
- Waterproof adhesive.

Refrigerator. Refrigerator doors should open away from the main area of the kitchen so the wheelchair does not have to move around the door. The refrigerator should be next to a counter where food may be set.

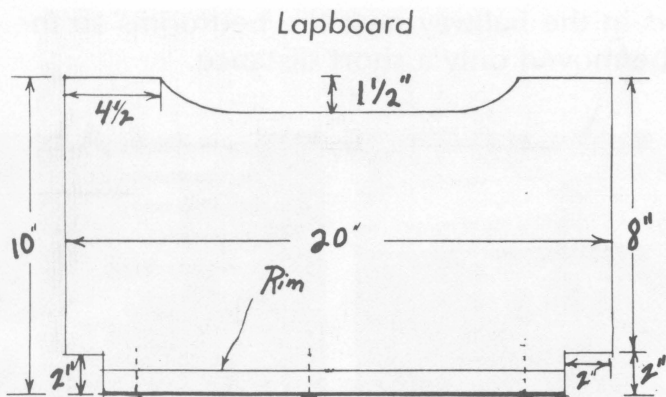
Hose attachment. A hose attachment at the sink will fill pans at the range or close to the range, reducing the need to carry them. The surface unit or range should be the same height as the counter.

Electric fry pan. An electric fry pan is more convenient than a fry pan on top of a range. The risk of burns is lessened because the electric fry pan can be used on a low table.



Pan-handle holder. A pan-handle holder serves the same purpose as a bowl holder. It keeps the pan steady while stirring. It can be attached to the stove with a magnet or suction cups. The width of the center slot may vary with the size of the handles or your utensils.

On a small range, the space between the burners is too small and the wood could burn. Make one that will fasten to either side of the range if using on a small range. The slotted portion can be shortened or lengthened to accommodate the height of the handles.



Lapboards. Some homemakers find lapboards useful. Several types of lapboards can be ordered from rehabilitation catalogues, or they can be made of wood. The rim on the front edge keeps items from falling off.

Plastic dishes. Plastic, unbreakable dinnerware is lighter to carry and is ideal for the homemaker who must set the table for a large family.

Reacher. A reacher enables the homemaker to reach items stored in high or low places. It can be ordered from a rehabilitation catalogue.

Magnetic stick. A wooden stick with a magnet on the end will pick up fallen metal objects. A simple one can be made by nailing a magnetic cupboard closer on the end of the stick.

Duster. A child's play dust mop will reach dust in high or out of the way places.

Vacuuming and scrubbing. Vacuuming and scrubbing, two household chores that most homemakers dislike, can be done by locking the wheelchair and scrubbing or vacuuming one area at a time. Then move on to the next spot. It does take strong arms.

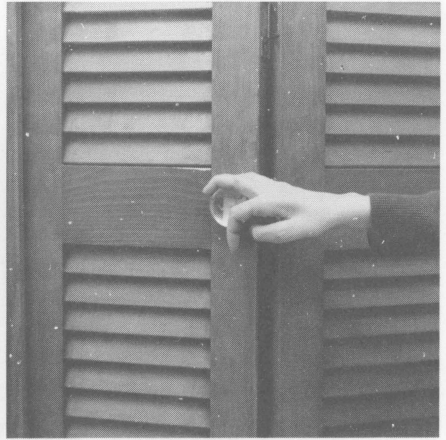
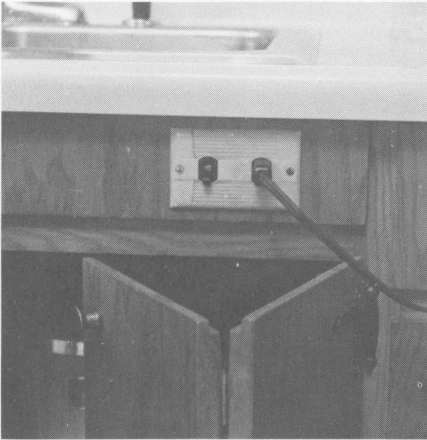
Neatness. Neatness means less work in the long run. For example, a piece of paper placed on the lap board or on the table before peeling vegetables can be picked up and thrown away, thus eliminating additional wiping up.

Laundry. Laundry facilities must be located where the homemaker can reach them easily. A good place for the



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laundry is in the hallway near the bedrooms so the clothes have to be moved only a short distance.



Adapting the Home

Outlets. Wall outlets should be higher than usual so the homemaker does not have to bend to reach them. In the kitchen, outlets should be on the front of cupboards to eliminate the need to reach to the back.

Carpeting. Carpeting should be hard-finished kitchen type that is easy to negotiate in a wheelchair.

Doors. Sliding doors move out of the way completely so the wheelchair does not have to move around them.

Door handles should be lowered to make them easier to use.

Doorways and hallways should be wide enough so the wheelchair can move through them easily. Three feet wide is adequate.

Ramps. Ramps should be built 1 foot long for every inch of rise. The incline can be more gradual if the homemaker wishes to wheel herself.

Illustrations and text are adapted from "Homemaking Aids for the Disabled." Copyright 1963, 1967, American Rehabilitation Foundation.

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