

Eating and Drinking

After a spinal cord injury, you may have weakness or loss of movement in your hands and fingers. This can make it hard to eat and drink without help. There are devices that can help you eat and drink with little or no assistance. If you have poor feeling, be cautious with hot foods and drinks to avoid burns.

Eating

Several devices can be used to assist with eating. Most of the devices help you hold utensils. When starting to eat by yourself, practice with foods that are easy to poke with a fork. If holding a fork is not possible, using your hands can be an option.

Sometimes, eating can only be done with assistance. Sometimes just having an assistant guide your hands can help. Always try to do as much as you can by yourself first. Ask for help once you get tired so that you can finish your meal.

Dorsal wrist splint: Use with spoons or forks when you have a weak wrist and fingers.

Universal cuff (U-cuff): Use with spoons or forks with weak finger.

Built-up handle: Larger handles are easier to grip with weak fingers. Use with spoons, knives or forks.

Rocker knife: Cut food with weak hands and fingers.

Plate guard or a bowl with high sides: Scoop food without food falling off the plate.



Above is just a sample of many modified devices that help with eating and drinking.

Contact your Occupational Therapist for more information.

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Drinking Aids

Drinking can be easier by using long and bendable straws. If you have some hand function, you can use specialized holders to help you hold a glass.

Glass holders: Hold a glass or cup with weak fingers. Your therapist can make you something like this out of splinting material.

Drinking straw holder: Position straws to help with drinking.

Extra-long straws: Drink without leaning forward as much.

Hydration pack and hose: Mount it to your chair or bed using flexible tubing.



Setting a Place to Eat

Tables can often be too low for eating while in a wheelchair. Raise a table by putting risers under its legs. Using non-slip material under your plate or bowl can help hold things in place and prevent spills.

Table trays: can be adjusted to the right height.

Lap tray: can be put directly on your lap when sitting in your wheelchair

Dycem: Non-slip material holds items such as plates and bowls in place.



U-cuff with fork, plate on anti-slip material (Dycem), and spoon with built-up handle

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Preventing Muscle Strain

When eating, try to keep a good posture by sitting upright (90°). Try not to hike (lift up) your shoulders. Hiking your shoulders is a common habit that occurs when arm muscles are weak. This can cause repeated strain on your muscles. Doing this for a long time can cause injury and pain over time.

Safety Precautions

If you have poor feeling, you need to use extra caution when handling hot food and drinks. Never place hot things directly on your lap. Here are a few helpful tips to prevent burns:

- Use a lap pad to carry food and drinks. Do not carry hot cups between your legs.
- Use an insulated mug with a lid to prevent spilling hot liquids.
- Carry hot drinks in cup holder mounted on your wheelchair.



Assistive Devices to help you feed if you don't have enough arm movement:

- OBI dining robot <https://assistive.kinovarobotics.com/uploads/BR-007-Kinova-Obi-brochure-r01>
- Robotic V6 <https://www.activehs.ca/products/neater-solutions>
- Liftware level <https://www.liftware.com/level/>

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