Overview

Adjusting to vision loss is a process. Initially, you may be filled with doubts that you will be able to lead a more independent life. But growing optimism can replace those uncertainties as you learn different ways to complete the everyday tasks that you once performed with vision. The techniques, adapted aids, and resources described in this course can help you reach your goal of living more independently. As its title implies, the content of this course concerns many activities across the day. The course provides information you can use to carry out the many tasks of daily living in a competent, more independent way.

The course is divided into seven lessons. Lesson 1 describes ways to safely move through familiar environments. Lesson 2 presents various tips for managing personal care. Lesson 3 suggests food-handling techniques. Lesson 4 suggests a number of housekeeping techniques. Lesson 5 explains how you
can efficiently manage time and money matters. Lesson 6 is optional if you live outside the United States, as it identifies resources that blind or visually impaired U.S. residents can access, the roles these resources play, as well as the benefits and services they offer. Lesson 7 describes recreational activities that you might enjoy. Throughout the course, you will encounter a variety of tips and techniques that former Hadley students have found particularly useful. You are also encouraged to share your ideas with your instructor so that they can be incorporated into future revisions of this course.

No prerequisites are needed to enroll in this course. To complete it, you will need writing materials in the medium of your choice as well as the materials that The Hadley School has provided. These materials include

- The large print or cassette version of the course
- Sock tuckers
- A wire-loop needle threader
• Tactile markers
• Egg rings
• A signature writing guide
• An envelope writing guide
• The large print or cassette version of the booklet “Social Security: If You Are Blind, How We Can Help,” from the U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998

All of the course materials are yours to keep. Duplicate or similar adapted living aids can be ordered through the specialty product catalogs included in the Resource List. You can also peruse the Resource List for contact information on the various organizations mentioned throughout the course.

If you are taking the recorded version of this course, you will also need a cassette recorder. Each new lesson begins on a separate cassette. Each cassette is tone indexed for your convenience: in fast-
forward or rewind mode, assignments are identified by a single tone.

With the exception of Lesson 6, which is optional for non–U.S. residents, you are required to submit the assignment at the end of each lesson. Complete each assignment in the medium of your choice (e.g., large print, braille, audiocassette, or computer disk), then send it to your instructor before beginning the next lesson. Mail your assignments to

The Hadley School for the Blind
700 Elm Street
Winnetka, IL 60093

If you are blind or visually impaired, you may use an envelope labeled Free Matter for the Blind, provided your assignments are in braille or large print (14 point or larger), on cassette or computer disk. To fax your assignments, or to send them electronically, contact your instructor for further instructions.
Lesson 3: Handling Food-Related Tasks

Lesson 1 described ways to safely and competently move through familiar environments. Lesson 2 suggested ways to manage various personal care activities. This lesson presents tips and techniques for handling food-related tasks.

A great deal of your time and energy can be spent in the kitchen preparing meals for yourself, your family, or your friends. Whether you are fixing yourself a simple lunch or attempting an elaborate three-course meal, this lesson offers practical suggestions on how to organize your pantry, prepare meals, and confidently dine. Familiarizing yourself with these techniques can enable you to achieve your goal of living more independently.
Objectives

After completing this lesson, you will be able to practice

a. Organizing your kitchen
b. Preparing meals
c. Eating meals with other people

Organizing Your Kitchen

Time spent in the kitchen can be quite enjoyable once you are organized. To achieve this, one of your first tasks is to draw up a shopping list and then exercise one or more of a variety of shopping options. Storing your groceries in an organized way and labeling them can help you readily find what you need whenever you prepare a meal.

Create a Shopping List

Perhaps you already have an effective way to keep track of the items you need to buy the next time you go shopping; for example, a list written in large print with a felt-tip marker. If not, however, consider
keeping a tape recorder in the kitchen to record the items you need to buy. Or, use magnets shaped like different foods so that when you run out of sugar, for instance, its corresponding magnet can be placed on the refrigerator door.

It doesn’t matter whether your shopping list is handwritten, typed, recorded, or, in time, brailed as long as it effectively jogs your memory at the store. Some people jot the items down on note cards because they can be clipped together by food groups (e.g., dairy or produce) or by sections (e.g., bakery or deli). Other people prefer to create a master list on the computer, then update it before going shopping. Philip, a schoolteacher in Idaho, organizes his list according to the aisles in his favorite grocery store. He lists the items he needs in the order that he encounters them while shopping with an assistant. If he has a coupon for any of the listed items, he marks that item with the letter c. When he cannot find the items on his list, he doesn’t hesitate to ask for assistance. This strategy has saved him time in the
long run because he learned where everything was located after just a few visits.

**Shopping Options**

There are several ways to buy your groceries. You can ask a neighbor, friend, or volunteer to buy the items on your list. Or, if you are familiar with the store’s layout, try shopping on your own or with sighted assistance. Small, privately owned stores and large supermarkets alike can provide help if you call ahead and ask the manager for sighted assistance. When selecting items where freshness and quality are important, such as seafood or produce, get acquainted with an employee in that department on whose judgment you can rely. In time, employees will honor special requests, such as slicing meat or deboning poultry.

The following tips can make shopping more convenient:
• Shop when the store isn’t busy. This enables the employees to assist you and to meet your individual needs.

• Ask the cashier to bag groceries according to the way they are stored, for example, canned goods in one bag and cleaning products in another. This makes unloading in the kitchen and pantry easier. Requesting that items that need refrigeration be bagged separately ensures that these goods stay cold longer and can be put away first.

• Pay with debit or credit cards as convenient alternatives to using cash and checks.

• Use a two-wheeled cart as a convenient way to get groceries home, even if you use a cane or dog guide. Taking public transportation, hiring a taxi, or asking a friend to drive are other options. If a friend is providing transportation, adding bulk or heavier items to the list makes sense.
• Take advantage of delivery services provided by some grocery stores. Despite the added expense, it may be well worth it.

More and more stores now offer shopping alternatives, such as ordering by phone or using computer software to shop on-line. Another option may be to fax your order to the store, for either pickup or delivery. Sometimes, stores have various delivery times available. And often stores allow you the convenience of selecting your payment option. Since the food industry is so competitive today, calling a few local grocery stores to compare the services they provide can make grocery shopping a much easier chore for you.

Storing Groceries

When you take the groceries out of their bags, how can you identify each item so that you can readily find it again? For the most part, you can rely on all your senses. It is relatively easy to determine the
contents of some boxed staples, like cereal, simply by shaking them. Similarly, creamed soups make little or no sound when shaken, whereas soups with vegetables, pasta, or rice produce a sloshing sound. Some foods come in bags you can just pinch to identify the contents; for instance, split peas do not feel like elbow macaroni. Other staples come in distinctively shaped containers; for example, sardines or corned beef. Your sense of smell enables you to distinguish oil from vinegar, even though they come in similarly shaped bottles. And your taste buds can distinguish catsup from steak sauce.

What’s a logical way to arrange your pantry so that you can easily find items? Keeping boxed items together on one shelf and canned goods on another is one option. Another is grouping items by meal; for example, pasta, sauce, and cheese. Some people designate particular shelves according to food items eaten for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Alphabetically arranging identically shaped cans (e.g., soup), from left to right or front to back, makes sense as well.
Similar techniques can be used to arrange your refrigerator, as well. Furthermore, some visually impaired people refrigerate fruit in glass bowls, vegetables in plastic containers, and main dishes in aluminum containers. A loaf pan could hold jars and bottles together. This also prevents them from getting knocked over or pushed too far back in the refrigerator where they can be difficult to locate—or to remember. Use airtight containers to store vulnerable foods, like cereals or flour, or keep these items in the refrigerator. This way you can prevent insects from contaminating the food.

**Labeling Foods**

Once the food is stored in an organized manner, how do you label items so you can identify what you want when you want it? If you have residual vision, print the name of the item on a label using a marker or felt-tip pen, and attach the label to the container with rubber bands. Or, shape pipe cleaners into letters and glue them onto the container. Other
labeling tools include raised markers, special labeling tape, or, in time, braille labels.

What if you cannot read large print or braille? You can distinguish one item from another by using a number of variously sized rubber bands. For instance, put a thick rubber band around a bag of frozen peas; a thin one around frozen corn. You can also use textured tape to differentiate items. For example, use masking tape to seal a package of crackers; medical adhesive tape to close a package of cookies. Raul, a contractor in São Paulo, rips can labels in certain ways to indicate the cans’ contents. One rip marks the tomato soup, two indicates mushroom soup, and so on. You could also put small, magnetic replicas of common fruits and vegetables on canned goods. Similarly, magnetic letters that stand for the first letter of the food’s name may work for you.

Initially, you might worry about forgetting your established labeling system. Kathryn, a researcher from Albuquerque, made notes for herself on a cassette and referred to them until she memorized
her system. Explain whatever system you design, however, to the people you live with and remind them to return things to where they belong.

No matter how many methods for storing and labeling foods you develop, there will be surprises. One day you will open corn and find peaches. You might plan to reheat soup only to find you’ve opened applesauce. Whenever this happens, keep your sense of humor. Just think what a great story you now have to share with family and friends, like the Hadley instructor who made chicken soup from scratch. To make the soup just right, she wanted to add some barley. Retrieving the box from her well-organized shelves, she poured a cup into the pot and set the timer for 20 minutes. Her mouth was watering as she checked the results. Since the grains were still too hard, she set the timer for another five minutes, then another five, and yet another five minutes. The barley just wouldn’t soften. It took the instructor another 30 minutes to discover that the box of barley was really a box of popcorn. The moral of the story—popcorn
kernels never get soft, but they make a wonderful story. Keep on cooking!

Organizing your kitchen will prove to be relatively simple if you practice the tips suggested in this section. Creating a shopping list, exercising your shopping options, as well as storing and labeling your food items can make this aspect of food handling a snap.

**Preparing Meals**

Cooking is a necessary chore for some, a creative endeavor for others, and a little of both for most. This section describes practical adaptations that enable you to safely and competently use your stove, oven, and microwave. It explains how you can practice measuring, pouring, peeling, and slicing the items you need for most meals. Even if you resort to precooked food items from time to time, this section also presents boiling, frying, and baking techniques that can take the chore out of preparing meals.
Safety and Convenience

Neither safety nor convenience should be sacrificed in the wake of your vision loss. The following tips can help ensure that both are preserved in your home.

For safety, ensure that you do the following:

- Keep a fire extinguisher nearby and know how to operate it *before* an emergency occurs.
- Store baking soda or salt within easy reach of your stove burners; if something catches on fire, sprinkle the entire contents of either product over the burner to douse the fire.
- Close the oven door when you detect a fire in the oven. Seek help immediately rather than attempt to extinguish the fire yourself.
- Install smoke alarms strategically throughout your home. Periodically check their batteries.
- Have a first-aid and burn kit readily available.
- Wear short or tapered sleeves.
- Tie long hair back for safety.
• Run through a mental checklist every time you leave the kitchen after cooking. For example, check that all cupboard doors are closed or that the oven and stove top are turned off.

For convenience, adopt the following techniques:
• Store all the ingredients needed for a recipe on a large tray. Return them to their shelves once they’ve been used.
• Locate the most frequently used appliances near an electrical outlet.
• Stack your everyday dishes at between waist and head level.
• Store glasses upside down for greater cleanliness and stability.
• Explain to others why they need to return items to where they belong.

A little foresight and organization go a long way in making your kitchen safe and easy to use, which also adds to the enjoyment of preparing meals.
Using the Stove, Oven, and Microwave

Are you wary of using the stove, oven, or microwave? With certain techniques and practice, you will soon do so with confidence.

Begin by asking a family member, friend, or rehabilitation instructor to help orient you to the appliance. Then ask for help with adapting the controls by using raised markers, drilling holes, or filing nicks to indicate the most frequently used settings (e.g., 350 degrees, the off position, the start button). In some areas, utility companies provide this service. The consumer affairs departments of some appliance companies also produce tactile knobs and overlays for their appliances. Once the controls are marked, it’s a matter of practice to be able to confidently adjust the dials. In time, you can even learn to gauge temperatures by listening to the height of a gas flame.

The following techniques and precautions apply when using your stove. Some people prefer to center pans on burners before lighting them. Others light the
burner, adjust the temperature, then set the pot or pan down. Whichever method you adopt, it’s imperative to position pot handles so they do not extend over lit burners or get hit by a passerby. Therefore, pot handles on the right-side burners should extend to the right; those on the left-side burners should extend to the left. Similarly, placing utensils on the stove top can prove dangerous when reaching for them. Instead, it’s advisable to put them on the counter. The same principle applies to lids, which should be placed to the right or left side of the burners. Why not consider buying stove guardrails or pan guards as an added safety feature? These keep your pots and pans from sliding off the burners. Paul, a banker from Nashville, reduced his fear of using a stove by practicing how to boil, fry, and steam food on a cold stove. This way, he familiarized himself with distance, height, and burner positions without worrying about heat.

Develop a habit of always knowing where your hands are in relation to the heat source. To remove
pots and pans, wear pot holders or oven mitts that cover your forearms or use specially shaped holders for iron pan handles. An especially effective pocket-shaped pot holder, made of heavy terry cloth, covers the back and palm of the hand. Since terry cloth is not as thick as the material used in oven mitts, it lends itself quite well to handling certain types of dishes. You can easily feel through it, making it possible, for example, to grasp the tiny handles of an egg poacher. It’s safer to avoid using regular towels as pot holders, however, because they could inadvertently touch a burner and catch fire.

How do you remind yourself to turn the stove or oven off? Miguel, a student in Tulsa, turns on a lamp, radio, or television whenever lighting the stove or oven. He only turns it off after he has also turned off the stove or oven. He also suggests setting a talking timer as a reminder.

Until you feel comfortable using the oven, a microwave can be a one-stop solution to many cooking needs. In fact, many people, blind and
sighted, consider the microwave oven the most useful kitchen appliance, due to its convenience and safety. Foods can be prepared in individual servings, with cooking and serving dishes often one and the same, which lessens the amount of cleanup as well as minimizes burn hazards. Bacon is a perfect example. Crisping bacon in a microwave, in a covered dish, eliminates the splattering fat, precludes the need to turn each slice, and makes cleanup easier.

Talking microwave ovens are available from specialty products suppliers, but they tend to be quite expensive. Certain models feature tactile dials or a braille stamp kit that turns regular buttons into touch-sensitive ones. You can also adapt a standard microwave by using tactile markings, such as glue, puff paint, or locator dots. Once you’ve practiced using your stove, oven, and microwave, you can soon prepare meals for the entire family.
Measuring and Pouring

The following adaptations and techniques can eliminate much of the guesswork involved in measuring and pouring. Graduated spoons and cups that come on a ring can be readily distinguished by touch. Some spoons and cups have marks that you can feel; those that do not can be adapted with notches or tactile markings. Whenever possible, avoid using clear measuring cups, since they become invisible against any surface. Rather, use measuring cups of a contrasting color; for example, a black cup to measure flour or a white cup for beef broth.

When measuring several ingredients, arrange them on one side of the bowl in the order you will use them. Then, return each ingredient to its place on the shelf after it’s been used. When measuring dry ingredients, heap the cup or spoon, then level it off with a knife or use your fingertips to check that you’ve measured correctly.

Measuring liquid ingredients requires different techniques, however. A commonsense approach
involves putting the cup over the sink or a shallow dish so spills can be contained. Put your hand across the top of the cup along its rim, then pour the liquid slowly until you feel the liquid touch your palm. Sometimes, it’s easy to tell when the spoon or cup is full because the liquid feels cold against your warm hand. Alternatively, place the liquid in a wide-mouthed jar and then use a bent measuring spoon as a ladle to measure the desired amount. Funnels also help to transfer liquids from one vessel to another. A funnel designed for canning has a wide mouth and works well to transfer noodles, pieces of vegetables, and other small foods. If you cannot readily locate a canning funnel, a relative or friend could saw off the tip of a large metal one. As with other techniques, cleanup is easier when you pour over a sink or tray to catch any spills.

You can estimate the amount of certain food items by comparing their weights with known quantities. For example, a stick of butter weighs four ounces. So, compare the weight of a portion of meat
with that of a stick (or sticks) of butter. Spices can be estimated by shaking into the cooking pot the amount that you would use for one portion as many times as the number of portions that the recipe yields. Since too much seasoning can be disastrous, stop a little short, and add more after you’ve had a chance to taste the dish. Similarly, use an eyedropper to measure a teaspoon of liquid.

Perhaps you struggle with opening milk cartons from time to time. The next time this happens, take the time to feel the lines that indicate where the opening is. If the packaging proves to be stubborn, carefully use a knife to pry it open.

Carrying a pot from the sink to the stove certainly presents a challenge, though you can minimize the risk of accidents by using certain methods. To boil water, set an empty pot on the stove first; carry the water from the sink in a pitcher; pour the liquid into the pot; then turn on your burner. Or, why not set your pot on a tray and then carry it to your stove? You can
use the same method to fill an ice cube tray that needs to be put in the freezer.

By practicing the following techniques, you will soon be able to pour liquids without spilling:

- Pour the right amount with the “dipstick” technique, which simply means having an index finger at the right place at the right time. With this technique, the container rests safely on a firm surface and is held securely at the very top by your hand encircling it. The index finger is just inside the rim so that you can feel when the liquid reaches the top.

- Pour liquid from a larger to a smaller container over a sink or tray. This works particularly well once you’ve developed a sense of when your cup is full. Place the spout against the rim of the glass before pouring. If the drink is yours, use the dipstick technique. If the liquid is hot, pour a short cup.

- Use a liquid level indicator that buzzes when the liquid nearly reaches the top.
• Use color contrast to determine how full your cup is, if you have residual vision. For example, use a light-colored cup for coffee and a dark one for milk.

• Use an inexpensive plastic fishing bobber—a solution shared by Hal, an accountant in Wichita. The fishing bobber floats on top of the liquid and strikes the finger before the liquid reaches the top of the cup.

• Avoid direct contact with hot liquids. For instance, when boiling water for a cup of instant coffee, why not fill the cup with cold water first, and then pour it into a pan? After the water boils, you can confidently fill the cup without its overflowing. Similarly, filling a cup with water and instant coffee before you put it in the microwave conveniently eliminates the need for pouring a hot liquid.
Peeling, Chopping, and Slicing

Even the simplest meal can require you to use a knife competently and safely. Peeling is a fairly simple process and can be performed with the same implements you have always used. Easy-to-hold vegetable peelers are available in general merchandise stores and can be used to peel fruits and vegetables. It can be tricky, however, to determine which part of a potato has yet to be peeled. Like some cooks, you may find it helpful to peel the potato when it’s dry, and then run it under cold water to feel the places you missed. Nevertheless, baking potatoes in their skins preserves their nutritional value, so why not take the easy way out? Or, make smashed potatoes! Just scrub them well with a vegetable brush and cut them into fourths or eighths before cooking them with the skins on.

Similarly, if you’re a novice cook, why not select plenty of raw fruits and vegetables that require little or no preparation? Many grocery stores today offer fresh, ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables that are
conveniently cut and packaged. Frozen, canned, and packaged convenience foods also require minimal preparation, though their sodium, fat, and sugar content is usually higher than that found in fresh foods. These options may be a little more expensive, but they allow you to vary your menus while your skills improve or when time is in short supply.

Though many visually impaired cooks use ordinary knives for chopping and slicing, sharpened knives are more effective than dull ones. If you are concerned about using sharp knives, select an inexpensive food-chopping device or knife cutting-guides (for right- and left-handed people). Until you’ve had the opportunity to practice using knives to peel, cut, or chop, use finger guards to prevent accidental cuts. And, if you spend a significant amount of time cooking, why not buy a food processor?

Chopping some items is not always worth it. For example, chopping parsley can be frustrating because its tiny leaves are difficult to hold and cut. To avoid the problem, place the parsley in a bowl and snip
through it with kitchen shears until the herb is chopped to the desired size. Or, in many recipes you can replace fresh parsley or other herbs with their dried varieties.

Several types of cutting boards are available from companies listed in the Resource List. Some have special edges to keep the food from falling off. They may also have a white side and a black side for contrast. George, a Hadley student who lives in Durham, notes, however: “These boards—at least those I have seen—are not large enough to serve as flat surfaces for rolling out cookie and pie-crust dough. This dough, usually white, simply cannot be seen by many low vision people on the usual white countertops of modern kitchens. Any metropolitan area will be likely to have franchise stores that make signs, and the common material for their products is a fairly heavy—about three-eighths of an inch thick—vinyl. I had no trouble in finding such a sheet in black vinyl, and the shop was quite willing to cut it to the size that would be convenient for my kitchen—about
20 by 30 inches. This material comes in a wide variety of colors, and any dark background would work equally well. If it slides too much, two or three pieces of double-sided duct tape stuck to the underside will hold it in place on the countertop for the time it takes to roll out and cut out a big batch of cookies. The shop may be willing to offer a reduced price on a slightly marred piece—it won’t matter to the cookie maker if there is a scar on the underside. When I bought mine, I got it for just a couple of dollars.”

*Boiling, Frying, and Baking*

Whether using your appliances to boil, fry, or bake, each technique has its own unique tips and adapted methods. Take boiling, for instance. An experienced cook can tell when liquid boils by its uniform bubbling sound, as well as by the vibration that can be felt in the handle. For draining food after it has boiled, a lock-lid saucepan and a strainer that clamps to the edge of most pans become handy tools.
If you would rather avoid boiling altogether, a slow cooker will allow food to simmer for several hours.

The following tips and adapted appliances can make learning to fry foods easier for you:

• Practice turning foods in a cold frying pan. Start with something easy to handle that will not make a mess if you drop it, like a piece of bread.

• Place only one item in the pan when you begin frying with the heat on. When you think it is cooked enough on one side, turn the burner off and allow it to cool. Then use a wide spatula to turn it over. Turn the heat back on to continue frying.

• Use a pattern, such as clockwise or two on top and two on the bottom, to help you even out the cooking time when frying several items in a pan. This makes it easier to remember which piece needs to be turned next. Transfer the food to a plate to make it easier to turn it over.
• Use a finger or a fork to determine when the food is ready. If you are concerned about touching food while it is still in the hot pan, remove the food to a plate. If the food is brown, it will feel crisp to the touch. In time, you will be able to gauge the degree of crispness you prefer. You will also be able to tell when your food is done by the sound it makes as it browns and from its smell.

• Try the following easy technique to fry an egg, whether you are blind or sighted. Remove both ends of a clean, empty tuna fish can, grease its insides, then place it on the frying pan. Break the egg into the ring and turn on the heat. After a minute or so, touch the egg with your fingertip to determine if it is done. Then use a spatula to transfer both the egg and the can to a plate. Wear pot holders while you remove the can. If you want your egg cooked on both sides, reverse it on the plate before you put it back into the pan.
• Place a splatter screen over the pan whenever you fry foods, to minimize the amount of cleaning involved.

• Turn off the burner first when removing excess grease from a pan. Then push the food to the far side of the pan before tilting it toward you. Once the grease has pooled along the edge, transfer it to an empty food can with a baster or a spoon.

The following adapted items can make baking much easier and safer. A talking timer indicates how long an item has cooked. A meat thermometer indicates whether or not meat is done. Some meat thermometers with a metal probe can be adapted to be read by touch. A friend or family member could remove the glass that covers the dial and mark the main temperature indicators with tactile markings around the circumference. You would then be able to determine if the roast is done by feeling the position of the needle in relation to the raised marks.
Don’t hesitate to experiment and use some creativity as well so that you can boil, fry, and bake to prepare the foods you and your family enjoy. Cooking can be enjoyable if you practice the tips suggested in this section. In time, using your stove, oven, and microwave to prepare your meals will become second nature. And peeling, chopping, or slicing need not become a blood sport. You can even master boiling, frying, and baking by applying the tips suggested in this section. In time, these aspects of food handling will contribute greatly to your feelings of independence.

**Eating Confidently with Others**

Now that the meal has been prepared, the next logical step is to eat it, either alone or with others. Many students confess that one of their biggest fears is eating in front of others. Whether at home with their family or in a public restaurant with friends, they fear looking foolish while eating. This section describes several tried-and-true techniques you can use to eat
your meals confidently, whether it’s pizza in front of the television or an elegant dinner out on the town.

_Eating at Home_

Handling food need not be problematic. When you are home, the easiest way to transfer food to a plate is over a clean tray or the sink. That way, spills can be cleaned up or food recaptured. The microwave offers another option since the plate can serve the dual role of cooking and dinner dish.

Whether eating alone, with your family, or with friends, eating at home offers you the opportunity to practice your eating skills while being able to relax at the same time. Initially, you might prefer to use dishes that feature raised edges or food bumpers, which make it easier for you to get the food onto your fork or spoon. If you have residual vision, notice how food stands out on a white plate. Another technique involves using your fork to locate the food on your plate. With practice, you can use a firm piece of bread to guide and push your food onto the fork.
Alternatively, use the fork to locate the food and the knife to push it onto the fork. Pay attention to the weight of the fork. This way, you can gauge whether you’ve got a chunk, bite, or nothing on your fork. Whether you use a piece of bread or your knife to act as the pusher, why not practice with easy-to-handle food at first? These techniques can also help you check your plate for any remaining food when you have finished your meal.

Practice makes perfect. Moreover, enlist the help of family members to provide feedback along the way. Sandra, a consultant from Baton Rouge, shares an eating tip. In the beginning, she ate mostly at home with family and friends. This gave her the practice she needed to master some of the techniques related to eating in the company of others. There, she also expressed her concerns that she might end up with spinach between her front teeth or spots on her blouse by the end of the meal. Family members suggested that she discreetly ask a dinner companion for a look-over after the meal. Such a casual check
eliminates any concerns. Generally, once you feel comfortable eating at home in the company of family and friends, you will gain the confidence to visit a restaurant from time to time.

*Dining Out*

When dining out, you can, for the most part, apply similar techniques to those you use at home. Common sense dictates that some foods might just not be worth the effort when dining out. For example, cracked crab, watermelon, and Rock Cornish hens are best enjoyed at home until you become well-practiced. Therefore, the first few times, why not opt for easy-to-handle foods?

When dining out with friends and family, ask a dinner companion to identify which foods are on your plate, as well as where they are located. The clock method works well for that purpose. For example, your companion might point out that vegetables are at two o’clock, meat at six o’clock, and so on. If dining by yourself, let your fork investigate what’s on your plate.
Mashed potatoes, for example, feel soft. Firmness might tell you whether you have meat, fish, or poultry. And vegetables come in a variety of shapes and consistencies. Ask for help if something presents more of a challenge, like locating your water glass or spreading butter on your bread.

If meat is served with fat, bone, or gristle, ask the chef to remove it. Similarly, ask that your meat be cut until you can cut it independently. Most restaurants have no problem with this request. Creative chefs can quickly cut your meat with their extra-sharp knives; some even reassemble the pieces so the meat looks whole on your plate. If your entrée comes with vegetables, request that they be served in a small bowl. This way, chasing peas all around a large dinner platter will not become an issue.

Are you worried that you might inadvertently knock over a glass or put your sleeve in the gravy? Practice the two basic techniques for locating items on the table, such as your water glass. One method is to slowly sweep one hand horizontally across the
tabletop until you make gentle contact with your glass. Another method is to slowly and repeatedly lower your hand until it touches the glass. Although both methods are efficient, the first one is less conspicuous. Above all, remember that your server and dinner companions will take their cues from you when spills occur. Why not quickly apologize, then direct the cleanup? Practice, experience, confidence, and time are your best allies, not to mention a sense of humor.

Are you unsure about which container is the salt and which one is the pepper? Try to use weight to identify one from the other, since pepper is lighter than salt. You could also use your sense of smell in this case. Or, a few sprinkles in the palm of your hand is another solution. Small creamer and sugar packets can sometimes be identified by touch—the creamer packet typically has a stiffer and smoother feel; it also feels more powdery when you squeeze the packet, like cornstarch. On the other hand, the sugar has a more granular feel when you squeeze the packet. Be
candid and don’t hesitate to ask for help when necessary, from either your dinner companions or the wait staff. Actually, the more relaxed you are, the more relaxed your dinner companions will be, as well.

When eating out, questions and situations will inevitably arise. For example:

• Are you concerned about when to start eating? You can usually determine if your dinner companions have begun eating by listening to the clinking of silver on the china. Or simply ask if everyone has been served.

• What happens if you order a sandwich and discover it has arrived open-face style? Unavoidably, your meal turns into a fork-and-knife adventure. Take it slowly, and remember to ask more questions the next time you order.

• How do you handle dining alone in public? Natasha, a teacher in San Diego, lets the server know about her visual impairment right away. Most servers appreciate the opportunity to make the customer comfortable and
frequently check the table for any requests. The fact is, whether a server or dinner companion, no one wants to witness your embarrassment or struggle.

Whether eating in or dining out, sharing a meal with others need not be problematic. In fact, there’s no need to assume that everyone is watching. Other people are probably enjoying the night out and the fine food, just as you are. This section described many tried-and-true tips and techniques to make dining enjoyable. Perhaps what’s most important is self-confidence and trust in yourself. By asking questions, candidly requesting assistance, and simply enjoying the evening, you can make this aspect of food handling a truly comfortable experience.

**Summary**

This lesson focused on food. It offered practical suggestions on how to organize the kitchen, prepare meals, and dine confidently. Practice and a healthy
dose of humor will serve you well as you continue your quest to live more independently.

Assignment 3

Complete the following assignment on a separate sheet of paper, cassette, or computer disk. Begin by stating your full name, student ID, address, and phone number. Also mention the name of this course, Assignment 3, your instructor’s name, and the date you plan to send the assignment to the Hadley School. Directions for sending your assignments are included in the Overview to the course.

Answer each of the following questions. Limit each answer to approximately one print page or a one-minute recording.

1. Prepare a menu for the next few days.
   • How do you create a shopping list?
   • Describe the services available at your local grocery store. Explain which shopping option works best for you.
• Describe how you store your groceries so that the food items are readily found.
• Tactile markers were included with your course materials. Describe how they enable you to organize your kitchen.

2. Describe a technique or adapted aid that would enable you to measure, pour, slice, bake, or fry. Egg rings were included with your course materials. How effectively did they enable you to prepare a meal?

3. Read the following article titled, “How Do You Eat This Stuff?” by Deborah Kendrick. As you do so, identify three techniques described in the article that you could practice to become increasingly self-confident when eating at home or dining out, alone or in the company of others.

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"How Do You Eat This Stuff?"
by Deborah Kendrick

Consider the following scenario. You are the keynote speaker and the only blind person at an award banquet of some fifty sophisticated persons. You dazzle all present as you navigate your way into the hall and thread your way brilliantly among the tables. You assume the speaker's platform with incredible polish and glow with the confidence of your own articulation and profundity. Following the applause, the hugs, and the hearty handshakes, you return to your table and gracefully sip a glass of wine. Then, the
moment of truth arrives: the salad is served, and to your dismay you find that it is not coleslaw, cottage cheese, or a tossed salad comprised of a multitude of bite-sized tidbits, but—horror of horrors—a firm blob of gelatin on a generous leaf of lettuce.

Maybe you manage the wiggly stuff, or maybe you delicately push it aside, but alas! Dinner arrives, and it, too, is problematic. Perhaps it is a breast of chicken on a bed of rice, smothered in sauce and surrounded by a dozen foot-long spears of broccoli. Or, maybe your particular nemesis is cutting meat, and you are presented with a gigantic slab of prime rib. All eyes must be on you, you feel certain, and you are positive the undoing of your flawless performance is about to occur.

Do you plunge ahead, risking the slopping of your brand-new jacket sleeve in the gooey
sauce? Do you feign dieting, maintain dignity, and simply continue sipping your wine? Or, do you bail out entirely and ask a table mate to cut up your food—and thus feel like a two-year-old?

I have concluded that blind people should approach eating with two ideas in mind: first, take it seriously; and second, have a sense of humor. Faced with just such a dilemma as described above, one friend told me that she was seized with an impulse to drop her face into the plate and begin gobbling! She didn't, of course, but knowing the self-consciousness caused by the pressure of others and the pressure we put on ourselves concerning eating etiquette, I understand exactly how she felt.

When I was a college freshman, I worked myself into such a bundle of genuine
neuroses over the whole business of "looking all right" when eating, that it amazes me in retrospect that I didn't also work myself into a serious state of malnutrition. For the first month or so of dormitory living, I was so self-conscious that I subsisted on applesauce and ice cream. Later, I simply didn't go to dinner at all because of my paranoia about getting through the cafeteria line gracefully.

One night, a senior phoned to ask me out to dinner. He was a top honors student, a member of the best fraternity on campus, the quarterback on the football team, and, most importantly, the dream of every girl on my floor—including my sophisticated and gorgeous, upper-class roommate who habitually fed my inferiority complex. So intense was my paranoia that I actually convinced myself that he had been hired by the Dean of Women to ask me out.
Wearing this psychotic conviction on my sleeve, as it were, I held up my end of the date like some kind of weird manikin. As if a victim of an acute phobia, I worked on myself prior to the event, pledging to eat a complete dinner. But when the time came to actually choose from among all the potential detriments to my self-image and composure, I opted once again for ice cream and iced tea. I have always been thin, and my conception of dieting at the time was naive at best; yet, I foolishly explained my eating behavior by a feeble pretense of wanting to lose weight! Fortunately, my bout with "blind anorexia" was a short-lived one. At seventeen the trauma seemed intense, but my lust for food rapidly overcame my fear of social blunders.

I offer this confession to make it clear that I do indeed understand the rational and irrational
terrors which can consume a blind person in matters of eating etiquette. As a result of my traumatic early college days, I was determined henceforth to ascertain and mimic what others at a table were doing. That, after all, is the key to alleviating any awkwardness we experience.

From my own experience and interviews with several other blind individuals, I offer the following general principles and specific suggestions:

Take control of your eating environment. Don't sit with your hands knotted in your lap, waiting for input from others. Everyone else is looking at the place settings, the arrival of cups, glasses, and salad plates, so you should do the same. If you see with your hands, then get them up there on the table to find out what's going on. You can thoroughly—and subtly—
explore the area before you, and thus become more comfortable with that environment before the food arrives. Make sure you keep your hands at tabletop level while exploring. You are less likely to put sugar in your water glass (or knock it over) if you know where it is when the iced tea is delivered.

When accepting help from others, the key again is to be in control. If you make it your business to find out what is on the table (remember, be subtle; no groping in your neighbor's soup, please!), you will naturally be more adept at taking care of your own needs.

If you need help, make that decision yourself. If you sit like some stiff ninny, oblivious to what is at your place setting, those around you will be inclined to hover—and take control. ("Can I butter your bread?" "Cut your meat?" "Feed you?") Once they see that you
are in command of your tableware, if you ask for one minor bit of assistance, the image of you as a competent person is still the one most likely to linger. Put yourself in command of what you CAN do, and what you CAN'T will be of no great consequence.

If you feel uncertain about how to handle a particular food, ASK. The person who provides you with the information will quite possibly thank you silently for the knowledge that he or she was not the only one suffering such questions. Having sight does not necessarily equal having social savvy at the dinner table.

I was at a fairly posh seafood buffet once with a friend who possessed an enviable degree of sophistication and style. Upon returning to the table with a plate laden with wonderful-smelling mystery foods, I blurted: "I don't
know how to eat any of this stuff." "Neither do I," she said. The meal became a kind of game in which she observed others, relayed information to me, and together we maintained some dignity and had a few good laughs, too. Even though I admitted that I was out of my element, I took control of my situation.

"Well," you may be saying, "this is all very fine and philosophical, but I need to know what to do when this or that particular situation comes up." Here are suggestions for handling some of the most common examples of awkwardness you may encounter while dining.

**Buffets**

If you have enough vision to get yourself safely through the buffet line, but not enough to identify the array of dishes laid out there,
count yourself lucky. Ask for the information you need, and move along. If, however, you have no usable vision, you have two choices: stay put and wait for a good Samaritan to "fix you a plate"; or ask someone else—preferably before they ask you—if you might go through the line together. My preference—you guessed it—is usually the latter. If you physically walk through that buffet line, you are taking control of your own situation.

The logistics can be worked out in a variety of ways. You can hold your own plate, or hold all the utensils for you and your guide; or, as one man I spoke with does, hold both plates. Let your guide do the actual serving, for obvious reasons. Everyone knows you can't see where the serving dishes are, so why hold up the progress of others by fishing around for them? By traveling through the line, making your own selections and carrying what
tableware you can handle, you are participating. You are in control.

To get back to your seat, the simplest method is usually walking slowly, touching arms or elbows with your guide. This technique may require some practice, but can be very effective. If you are talented at juggling a number of objects in one hand, then feel free to hold your guide's arm.

**Family-Style**

If something is passed to you, and others fully expect you to serve yourself, it's usually advisable to do so. Again, be familiar with what's on the table. If you know, for example, that the basket of rolls is six inches from your hand, take some initiative. Take one, and pass them along.

If the person beside you simply assumes the
responsibility of filling your plate, and there is no easy way of stopping him (short of wrestling the platter from his hands), let it happen. Your primary intention, after all, should be to make everyone, including yourself, as comfortable as possible.

**Condiments**

Some foods are inescapably difficult for a blind person to handle. It's much more practical, for instance, to ask for assistance in pouring the salad dressing than to create for yourself an undesired salad soup!

Salt, on the other hand, can be mastered with some sleight-of-hand. First, if it isn't pointed out to you, you can determine the salt shaker from the pepper shaker by weight: the salt shaker is heavier. Then, to determine how rapidly it pours, you can shake a little into your hand and then sprinkle it from your hand
to the food (which is a little tricky to do inconspicuously); or, get the fingers of your free hand unobtrusively under the "line of fire" when you begin shaking.

Cream for coffee can be handled in the same way—by getting those sneaky fingers into the line of fire for a second or two. If the cream is not already individually portioned, however, my advice is to ask for assistance ("Would you drop a bit of that cream into my coffee while you're pouring?") Pay attention to what those around you are doing so that requests of this nature can be timed as appropriately as possible.

Butter, jam, jelly, etc., should not be difficult, particularly if the bread or rolls are warm. You probably butter your own bread at home, but if you don't, start practicing. Again, in the interest of keeping everyone comfortable, if
your roll is cold and the butter is colder, and you are seized with the dread of blundering, ask someone—as casually and graciously as possible—to bail you out.

One final word on the subject of condiments: my guess is that there is not a totally blind person alive who pours his or her own pancake syrup in the company of others. It simply isn't worth it!

**Meat Cutting**

I have a fantasy that goes something like this: Once upon a time, there was a sighted evil being who jealously guarded his power and feared being outwitted and overthrown by the blind. "Let's draw up a list of skills," he said, "and start circulating rumors that these things are impossible for blind persons to do. Oppressed classes being what they are, the rumors alone will solve all of our problems."
Now, as the fantasy goes, mobility was not on the list (for the underlings had already begun to realize what could be done with a well-formed tree limb). It did, however, include such basic skills as handwriting, dancing, and outdoor sports. Also included, somewhere near the top of the list, was the supposedly insurmountable task of CUTTING MEAT.

Most blind people I spoke with in preparing this article felt either extremely comfortable or extremely uncomfortable with cutting meat. Those who felt uncomfortable usually admitted that no one had ever taught them how to do it. For a long time, incidentally, I fell into the uncomfortable category. People said that it was something I could not do, and I believed them. Self-consciously, I carried the shame that I was not privy to the mystical secrets of meat cutting to many a dining table.
When I was twenty, I confessed to a teaching friend one morning that I was anticipating my date the next evening with enthusiasm and horror. "He wants to take me to restaurant X," I said, "and I know he'll expect me to order a steak." She was obviously confused, so I added, "He'll think I'm an idiot when he finds out that I can't even cut my meat." She was a good teacher and a better friend. In ten minutes the situation was remedied in her kitchen. My lesson in meat-cutting left me perplexed by the fact that I hadn't learned such a simple skill sooner. For those of you who have not taken the meat-cutting plunge, trust me, the rumors are false.

If, however, you remain unconvinced or you are too self-conscious to ask someone for similar instruction, there are alternatives. You can become a vegetarian, or you can ask the person beside you at the table to do the
cutting. The most comfortable solution while dining out is probably to have your meat cut in the kitchen. This last solution is the common practice of many capable and intelligent blind people, so you will not be testing the unknown.

Assuming that you have made it through the meal unscathed, and are with a group of people—rather than only one person—I have one final tip. Ask the waiter or waitress to take your money to the cashier for you. This is something many sighted people do, but for a blind person it can be an invaluable asset to getting through a meal and out the door without jeopardizing one's sense of composure.

Eating is far more than survivalist or even pleasurable in our society. Many momentous decisions concerning careers, friendships,
marriages, and social status are made over a clutter of cups and plates. The personal friend of a highly-celebrated blind musician once told me that his friend never ate anything but sandwiches in the company of strangers. That seems a bit outrageous, but, tragically, it was probably true. Having been victimized by "blind anorexia" myself, I can recognize clearly the symptoms of another similarly afflicted.

My simple advice? If you know you have certain problems with eating etiquette, practice them in the privacy of your own kitchen. Then, when you are in the public eye, you will be able to relax and enjoy the food. If you appear confident and in control, chances are no one will notice if you do mistakenly eat a sprig of parsley, spear a lemon wedge with your fork, or pick up the slice of quiche with your fingers while meticulously cutting the
bran muffin into bite-sized pieces. In any event, DON'T GO HUNGRY!

Now that you have finished reading, identify three techniques described in the article that you could practice to become increasingly self-confident when eating at home or dining out, alone or in the company of others. This concludes Lesson 3. Now proceed with Lesson 4: Housekeeping.