NOW THAT I’M ONE-HANDED, HOW DO I…
A GUIDE FOR SUCCESSFUL ONE HANDED FUNCTIONING

Many of us find ourselves without the use of one of our hands during some point in our lives. The cause and effect may be temporary, such as with a broken bone, shoulder or wrist surgery, etc., or more permanent, such as a stroke, severe tissue damage or loss, etc. Whatever the cause, we suddenly are baffled about how to accomplish one handed what we used to do so easily with two, such as tying our shoes, flossing our teeth, etc. If you or a loved one are struggling with these issues, this guide’s for you! You'll find the topic you need under categories like general tips, personal care, baby care, cooking and more. Look for the ⭐ for items of special, or extra, significance. Some of the techniques described assume the presence of fingers, hand or stump on the nonfunctional side, usually used for anchoring, etc.

GENERAL TIPS

We have been blessed with several other body parts that can be called upon to help perform tasks generally left to our hands. Some of those could be:

✔ Hips can push and hold doors open and water fountain pressure bars in. (We knew hips were to serve some purpose, didn't we?)
✔ Elbows can push buttons- on elevators, water fountains, "airpot" coffee dispensers, etc.
✔ Legs squeezed together can hold jars in vise-like grip while being opened.
✔ Teeth can hold and tug items, such as gloves, shirt cuffs, etc. Be careful with this one- your dentist may not appreciate the full range of your new talent.

The general rule is- be creative! Usually, there are several ways to achieve our goals; we just become creatures of habit, and want to do everything the old, comfortable way. You might even find some of these new techniques are even easier than ones you used before. As you stretch your creativity, remember that one of your goals is to do what you need/want to do without injuring the functional arm and shoulder. If a new method causes pain or undue stress on bones, joints and/or muscles, figure out another way to accomplish the task. Your new motto should be, "I can do it" and then do it!

PERSONAL CARE

Bathing- Use a long-handled bath brush to clean hard to reach places. Pour shampoo and/or conditioner into the cap, then pour that on top of your head. Hair can be scrubbed just as well with one hand as with two.

Flossing teeth- Use one of the ready-made, disposable flossers, such as the one illustrated here. They work well, are inexpensive, and can be found wherever oral care products are sold.
**Trimming Fingernails**

a. Use an emery board. Either anchor it in the nonfunctional hand, or under your thigh, while you are seated, or
b. Affix a long handled set of nail clippers to a board. Place the board on a flat surface, position fingernail and depress the clippers with the nonfunctional limb.

**Fastening (pierced) earrings**

a. *Earrings with posts and backs*—Put the post in, fold up the lobe of the ear (covering the front of the earring) and hold with third or fourth finger. Use thumb and first or second finger to attach earring back. Release lobe.
b. *Hoops*—The easiest to fasten are those with straight posts through the ears and hooks (brackets) to slip them into.

**Putting on a watch**—A watchband that closes with an "S" type fastener is easiest, because it stays on the wrist while being fastened. Next easiest is a fully stretch band. Fingers on the other hand can grasp part of it to help pull it on. Teeth can be used, too, if necessary; but again, be careful. Bands that buckle should be replaced with one of these other types.

**Putting on a bra**—Front-fastening bras are the most convenient. Anchor one side to the body with the nonfunctional limb and fasten with the functional hand. Put rear-fastening bras on backward, using same basic technique. Turn it around and adjust as necessary.

⭐️ Use this same "backward" technique to fasten skirts with back zippers, and even some (but not all) zippered dresses. Usually, you can get a dress zippered 1/2 to 2/3 of the way up, turn it around, and slip arms through the sleeves. Then reach down over your shoulder to your back and pull it the rest of the way.

**Putting on Pantyhose**—Stretch and smooth pantyhose over one entire leg, then go back and repeat the process with the other. Forget support hose. They are practically impossible to put on single handedly.

**Drying Hair**—Some models of blow dryers have stands. If yours does not, or if the angle at which it holds the dryer is not adequate, try this: Place blow dryer on a rolled up towel on the countertop. Bend over and move your head and hair, rather than the dryer. *Be careful that the towel does not cover the vent on the dryer*—that could lead to overheating.

Hair care can be tedious and time consuming. You might want to consider keeping it short and/or permed so it will not require a lot of styling to be attractive.

**Rising from a Seated Position**—Make sure there is proper support, such as a counter, table, etc. on your stronger side to lend stability when getting up from a seated position. You might want to choose straight-backed chairs, and avoid soft-"sink into" chairs and sofas whenever possible.
Tying Shoes with One Functional Hand

1. a. Wrap the end of the shoestring (the end on the functional side) around the nonfunctional thumb, other finger or stump.
   b. Grasp the other end with the functional hand, pull to the functional side; slip under the taut lace and back over to form base of knot. Pull to tighten knot.

2. Form loop on end held on functional side. Pull to opposite side. Release other end.

3. a. Secure loop in nonfunctional hand as shown.
   b. Wrap loose end around loop, making top of the knot with functional hand. Pull through forming the second loop.

4. a. Slip one loop onto thumb, finger or stump on each side. Pull outward to tighten.
   b. Straighten out the ends of laces.

It's tied- as tightly as you desire by the strength of your pull!
FOOD PREPARATION

General Kitchen Tips

a. Select cookware that is of medium weight, at most. While lightweight cookware allows foods to cook less evenly and burn more easily, heavy saucepans are difficult to lift. It might be worth a visit to a cookware store to try lifting pans before you purchase.

b. A stand mixer is more convenient than a hand mixer, although it takes up more counter space.

c. For some baked desserts, such as custards or pie fillings, it is sometimes easier to pull out the oven rack, place the empty baking dish on it and pour the custard/filling in there, rather trying to lift a filled dish that could spill before it gets in the oven.

d. Use heavy oven mitts rather than small potholders for a better grip on larger items hot from the oven.

e. Leave small appliances on kitchen counters if space permits. Many of these appliances are too heavy and/or bulky to move easily with one hand. Lifting from countertop to cabinet may be a chore. You are more likely to use these time and energy saving aids if they are within easy reach.

f. Salad "scissors" are very helpful for serving salads and other bulky foods, like roasted potato pieces, etc. These glorified tongs are made from a variety of materials—plastic, stainless steel, and silverplate to complement any table service.

Chopping/Slicing

a. Food processors are wonderful devices to ease and speed chopping, slicing, grating, and even to mix batters and knead bread dough.

b. Prepare a cutting board for your special use by imbedding a long nail or other sharp point in it. You can then impale onions or other vegetables/fruits on it to hold them while you slice or chop.

_Dried or frozen chopped onions and other vegetables work well in soups, stews and sauces. Here you have the flavor without the work._

c. Use a "box" grater to grate foods manually, anchoring the top with the nonfunctional limb.

Mixing and Stirring

- Place bowl on non-skid surface (such as a rubber mat or shelf liner material) or use a bowl with suction cups on the bottom to hold it firmly in place on the counter.

Opening Bottles, Jars and Cans

a. Use a jar opener that mounts under a cabinet. There are many styles, but they all work on the same principle—slide the jar into the opener as far as it can go, and turn.

b. An opener such as the one illustrated here may be used successfully. Sit down, place a towel on your lap, set the jar between your legs on the towel, and squeeze legs together firmly. Now you can remove the lid with your functional hand.

c. Use an electric can opener. Anchor the handle that closes to cut the lid with the nonfunctional limb.
HOME CARE

Vacuuming- While all vacuums are operated with one hand, some are harder to push. You might consider a self-propelled model, which should lessen the wear and tear on your functional arm and shoulder, or a canister type, where all you push with your arm is the hose.

Ironing- This can be difficult and time consuming. Thankfully, modern manufacturing methods have yielded fabrics that wrinkle less than they used to. A few special steps when washing and drying clothes may mean no ironing is needed. Try these techniques:
- Use the dryer heat selection recommended for the type fabric. When in doubt, less heat is best.
- For most permanent press fabrics, remove from dryer while still damp. Immediately, shake well, straighten out seams, sleeves, collars, etc. and hang on hangers to finish drying.
- Spray water (using a spray bottle) on clothes that got too dry, or were not hung promptly, and are therefore too wrinkled. Shake and hang clothes as described above. Spot spray more wrinkled areas, if needed. Should the item be badly wrinkled, wet the garment more thoroughly and pop back into the dryer, remove while still damp and proceed as above.
- Hang skirts which hems are prone to roll up (bias-cut, denim, etc.) upside down on hanger while damp, using several clothespins on hem. Spray hem area with more water, if needed. This will help keep the hems straight.

When traveling, pack a few of your own hangers. Straighten your clothes on the hangers; then hang on the shower curtain rod. Fill the tub 1/2 to 2/3 full of hot water, close the bathroom door and let the clothes steam for at least 20-30 minutes. The wrinkles should come right out.

BABY CARE

Yes, you can care for a baby using only one hand, and very successfully, at that. As a baby grows and learns to recognize you, he will figure out how you pick him up, and he will eventually "help" by lifting his arms to correspond to the movements you will make. It really is wonderful teamwork.

Picking Up an Infant- If the infant is on the floor or some other location difficult for you to reach easily, try this:
- Reach down and slip functional hand under baby's arm and to his back.
- Rotate hand and arm gently, turning baby over. You now will be supporting the baby face down on your forearm.
- Lift baby to your chest. You can then change his position as desired.

Bathing- Bathe an infant in a baby bathinette (that fits over the kitchen sink). This holds the baby securely, letting you use your hand to wash. Remember, never leave a baby unattended in a bathinette.

Diapering and Clothing
- Use diapers that fasten with tape or Velcro, not pins. While it is possible to fasten a safety pin one handed, fastening a pin on a diaper with a squirming baby is exceedingly difficult.
b. Select one piece snap front clothing whenever possible for an infant. These are simple to put on and remove.
c. Use shoes that fasten with Velcro rather than tiny laces or buckles.

**Feeding**

a. Put a pillow on your lap on the nonfunctional side to support the baby when nursing or bottle feeding.
b. Place the baby in her baby carrier or other infant seat when feeding cereal, fruit, etc. This supports her well and in the right position, leaving your hand free to hold the spoon.
c. Obtain a high chair with a one-hand tray release. Some models are on the market.

**Transporting**

a. Use a front-facing infant carrier rather than a backpack style. This allows you to maintain control as you put the carrier on- with or without the baby in it.
b. Wheel baby around in a stroller or carriage that can be set up and taken down with one hand. Several styles are available on the market.

**Hair Care Tip**

- It is possible to put your preschool child's hair up in ponytails or pigtails using the ball type hairbands, like the one illustrated here. Brush hair and pull it together in a "tail". Either place hair in nonfunctional hand, if it can grasp, or have your child hold it, herself. Place one end of the band- one ball- in your teeth. Craning your head down to the hair, you can use your mouth as an "extra" hand to position the band near the tail. Pull the other end of the band around the tail with your hand, slip the ball in your hand through the loop on the teeth side, and release the ball from your teeth. *This one takes a bit of extra effort, but it can be worth it, particularly for summertime play.*

**Transportation**

Automatic transmission is a must. One can steer a car relatively easily with one hand, particularly with rack and pinion steering, but steering and changing gears at the same time is another story, entirely.

**Steering**

- Should you find steering one handed difficult, you can obtain a steering knob, which looks rather like a doorknob, and mounts on the steering wheel. Simply grab the knob and turn.

Keep a white or other light colored hand towel in the car to place over the knob when the car is parked and the sun shines in brightly. This will keep the knob from becoming too hot to handle.

- When purchasing a new vehicle check the placement of necessary controls, such as ignition, lights, windshield wipers, etc. on the dashboard, to assure they are within easy reach of your functional hand. Some models are better suited to one hand or the other. Knowing this and planning accordingly will make your driving experience easier, safer, and more enjoyable.
MISCELLANEOUS

Try to use the appropriate implements, whenever possible. Many items, such as scissors, knives, tweezers, etc. have been designed for "lefties". Should your left hand now be your dominant one, you may find these tools easier, and perhaps better, to use.

Carrying Groceries- Plastic grocery bags generally are easier to handle than paper bags. More groceries can be placed in them and the bag slipped over the arm (the functional and/or the nonfunctional). Be careful not to overload either arm. Placing the bag handles (and, therefore, the weight) closer to the elbow will lessen the stress on the joints.

Canvas or other "tote" bags that slip over your arm are great for carrying a variety of items that you might otherwise carry in a backpack, should a backpack prove unwieldy with one functional arm/hand.

Photography

Most cameras are held easily in one hand. Right-handed people should have no difficulty holding the camera and depressing the shutter button. Left-handed people have two options, depending on the type of camera:

a. Point and shoot cameras (including single use ones)- Hold the camera upside down- that way the shutter will be on the bottom left. Do not worry when people tell you the camera is upside down (and they will!). You can tell them simply to turn the picture around.

b. Single lens reflex camera- These are even easier than the point and shoot ones, for you can stabilize the camera by grasping the camera in the palm, and wrapping the thumb and fourth or fifth fingers around the barrel of the lens. Another finger can reach up and depress the shutter.

Eyeglasses- Use an eyeglass chain around your neck to hold your glasses if you wear them for certain tasks only, such as reading. This will prevent your misplacing the glasses when you take them off, and put them down while you use your hand for something else.

Personal Computers

a. There are modified keyboards for both left and right hand alone use. You may find, however, that these might be impractical if you share keyboards with people using two hands. Single handed keyboard users may find a standard keyboard easier to use than an ergonomic one (that which is curved) because there is less distance for the hand to travel over the keys.

b. "Shortcut keys" in Windows® operating system technology (such as Ctrl C for "copy", Ctrl V for "paste", etc.) may make using the keyboard easier. After all, if your one functional hand is on the keyboard, it can't be on the mouse at the same time. Using shortcut keys keeps your hand in one spot more of the time, speeding up some processing tasks and lessening the
wear and tear on arm and shoulder. Descriptions of available shortcut keys are found on the "pulldown" menus in Windows® based applications, and in Windows® help files.

c. Use a pencil, eraser side down, grasped in (or rubberbanded to) nonfunctional hand to depress keys on the keyboard when you must depress two or more keys at once or when you need to depress a key while simultaneously moving the mouse.

Musical Instruments—Do not believe that your music career has to be over because you now use only one hand. A substantial quantity of interesting and challenging piano music for one hand alone is available. Adaptations for some other instruments may be found or contrived as well, such as stands to hold trumpets, etc.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These are just a few of the available resources available for one handed functioning:


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The New Mexico Office of Disability and Health

Susan O. Gray, who prepared this guide, has lifelong one-handed experience. While there may be other techniques that would accomplish the same ends, these are those she's learned and used all her life. This information is for guidance, only, and should not replace advice from one's physician and/or rehabilitation specialist. The contents of this guide are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.