

Small Habits and Large Change:
The Liftware Spoon

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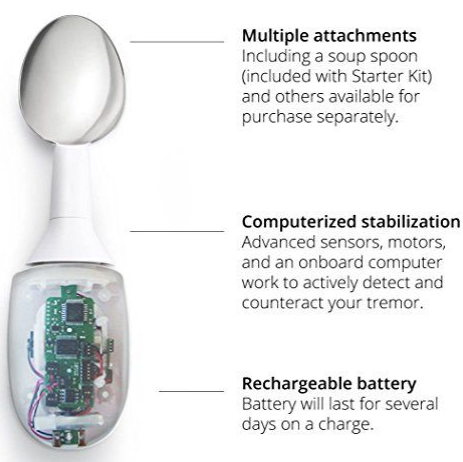
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In an increasingly digital world, we, as a society, have evolved to become more technologically savvy. Technology influences all aspects of our lives now, specifically in relation to design. Design and technology are often combined to create new products to help people, especially products used by people in the disabled community. One example of this can be seen through people who experience hand tremors and the Liftware Spoon. Hand tremors are common in Parkinson's patients and are caused by involuntary contractions, which result in a shaking motion in the hand. They cause difficulty in writing, lifting, and eating. Eating and feeding oneself is a basic function of human life, but people with hand tremors could not do so since food goes flying off the spoon when tremors occur. This reality was true until the creation of the Liftware spoon. The Liftware spoon is a spoon that self stabilizes, which prevents food from falling off the spoon when one occurs. The spoon has had significant cultural impact on the stigma behind disabled people being radically different from the rest of society and helps normalize occurrences like hand tremors. Though there are financial barriers in mass producing objects like the Liftware spoon, changing small daily use items like spoons to become more accessible should be our goal as a society in order to destroy the false stigma that disabled people are incapable to ensure a more equal future.

The Liftware spoon was designed by Anupam Pathak in 2013. The primary material of the spoon is a white plastic coating that encases the spoon's technology. The spoon's three main pieces are a socket for attachments, a rechargeable battery, and a stabilizing handle. At the top of the spoon is the socket for attachments, which can be cleaned along with the attachments. The attachments include a soup spoon, a fork, and a daily spoon. The neck of the spoon features a

stabilizing handle that has a computer and two motors in it to detect tremors. The tremors are then countered by the spoon's oppositional movements programmed by the computer inside. In the bottom segment of the spoon that the user holds is the rechargeable battery. According to a review done by the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, "The rechargeable battery can run continuously for 90 minutes, and automatically turns off when the spoon is placed face-down."¹ While the makeup of the spoon is complex, the spoon itself is quite portable and easy to carry around for usage, as it weighs roughly 100 grams and is the size of a non-specialized tablespoon.

Source: <https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51UkcCpkIdL.jpg>



Furthermore, besides a slightly bulkier base and white plastic coating, a silver spoon and the Liftware spoon look relatively similar. The use of the spoon never changes, so this identity in use and look is key to the culture change the spoon promotes. In American society, there exists a stigma that disabled people are somehow less capable because they look and perform daily activities differently.

Specifically with hand tremors, if someone's hand was shaking, preventing them from eating, society would deem that person as radically different by staring or commenting because they could not feed themselves, a basic human activity. The Liftware spoon eliminates this issue.

According to Amazon testimonials for this product, the Liftware spoon is so physically similar to regular spoons that actions like staring and commenting, which make people uncomfortable and

¹N. Smith, "Liftware: Self Stabilizing Eating Utensils for Individuals with Hand Tremor" Ottawa: Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health. 2015 August. (CADTH issues in emerging health technologies; issue 142)

feel different, are minimized. For example, Peter R. says that “ Eating became less about trying to get a utensil to my mouth 10 or 20 times, and more about consumption. For me, it was surprisingly emotionally liberating and relaxing.”² No one can notice that the Liftware is even being used, and if it is, that it is different. The Liftware spoon also prevents the food from flying off the spoon, the action which causes the stigma to occur. Furthermore, their own confidence is increased. Disabled people are no longer viewed as less capable people, but rather just people, boosting their self esteem.

The Liftware spoon has the potential to produce a great cultural change, but, Anita Perr, an occupational therapist at the New York University Ability Project, has concerns about the financial feasibility of this product and assistive products in general. When asked about the challenges of designing products, Perr observed that “It all comes down to finances and it's too bad.” The financial barriers are the biggest issue with these creations for Perr and many other experts in the field. To Perr, “You have this teeny tiny group of people who could benefit from this [development] and the research and the years and years of work that went into developing it,” are what make the product so expensive.³ In other words, the Liftware spoon is meant for a niche market, or an extremely specific audience, so the product has to be costly. The Liftware spoon starter kit, for example, “includes one stabilizing handle and one soup spoon attachment,”⁴ but is \$195.00. An additional attachment is \$34.95. These prices are astronomical compared to the prices for non-specialized versions of these objects. A wooden saute spoon can be bought for

² “Customer Review,” Amazon, accessed August 5, 2019, https://www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/R12J3FAJPANZVD/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_viewpnt?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B00JDSIOJE#R12J3FAJPANZVD

³ Anita Perr, Interviewed by the author, Digital Recording. New York City, NY. July 23, 2019.

⁴ “Store,” Liftware, accessed July 31, 2019, <https://store.liftware.com/>

\$2 off of Amazon, just about 1% of the price of the Liftware spoon. This is the sad reality of many assistive products. The point of these products is to make daily living more accessible but they are not financially accessible, a dilemma we as a society must strive to solve.

I would argue that products like this spoon are the key to a more accessible, equal future if they can become more affordable. The Liftware spoon is at its core a spoon, an object that almost every person has in their home and can get by going to their nearest fast food restaurant. Spoons are made with all materials like plastic and metal and all colors like red and white. Spoons are everywhere, and everyone uses them, so, by introducing a product, which everyone uses like a spoon, that is especially designed for the disabled community, the disabled community becomes part of a larger community. The barrier and stigma that they are different is destroyed, creating more commonality between disabled people and the rest of society. To become a more inclusive society, we must change small things first and then change bigger things. Basic objects like spoons are part of this first change. By changing a small stigma first through utensils and who uses what kind of spoon, larger stigmas can be tackled.

In conclusion, the Liftware spoon is an object designed for people who have hand tremors and has impacted many people with hand tremors. The product has accommodated hand tremors by making the physical difference in spoons not as prevalent since the Liftware and traditional spoons look similar and by eliminating the inability to feed oneself with the self stabilizing technology. The Liftware spoon has produced a cultural change by normalizing the occurrence of hand tremors in which, disability is not frowned upon as society once used to do. However, despite its tremendous use and necessity, there remains a financial barrier stands in the way of it becoming a household item. The solution to this barrier is unknown, but one thing is

clear: If society is truly to become more equal, the elimination of the stigma against disabled people as lacking in adaptability is both necessary and easiest to change with small objects like spoons. We must change our small habits to expect large change, a feat possible with the Liftware spoon.

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