

Remodeling for the Golden Years

It's a fact of life—we're all growing older. However, while aging is inevitable, it's not inevitable that you be forced out of your homes when you become less active. There are many options available to allow you to age gracefully in your own home. With some careful planning, we can create a home that will continue to work well for you throughout your golden years.

A home that is user-friendly for the elderly and the disabled does not need to look like a hospital. More and more products designed for individuals with disabilities have broken the "institutional" design mold and are now quite attractive. Plus, in many cases, the simple structural modifications go unnoticed by virtue of Universal Design. UD is imminently practical and seamless in its application. Here are some things to think about:

Make Things Easier to Reach

- Raise electrical outlets and phone jacks from 12 to 18-24 inches above the floor; people in wheelchairs will find this height more accessible.
- Lower electrical switches and thermostats from 48 to 42 inches from the floor; again, this provides easier access for people seated in wheelchairs.
- Move the bathroom medicine cabinet to the side of the bathroom vanity. Cabinets over the sink aren't practical. Also, medicine cabinets can be installed at wheelchair-friendly heights in almost any wall, creating accessible storage space without encroaching into valuable floor space.
- Have multiple light switches installed. For example, at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Lower the height of racks, shelves, and poles in closets to make them more accessible.

Make Moving Around Easier

- Widen doors from the standard 30 inches to 36 inches to accommodate a wheelchair.
- Install chair lifts or elevators if necessary to provide access to other levels of the house.
- Make sure the flooring in the kitchen and bath is made of a non-slip finish, and is in a matte tone to diminish the glare of overhead lighting.
- Build attractive ramp systems to aid in wheelchair entry and egress of living spaces as well as increase visitability.

Make Things Easier to Use

- Replace standard doorknobs with levers that are easier to maneuver with arthritic or compromised hands.
- Consider replacing double-hung or slider windows with crank-style casement windows.
- Install décor-matching grab bars and railings near the toilet and in the bath or shower stall.
- Use single-lever faucets for the sink. Controls can also be offset to allow for easier access. These allow you to control the temperature with one lever and with minimal reaching.
- Create easily distinguishable work areas by using contrasting colors. This is especially important in the kitchen because it allows better contrast and visual perception for individuals with low vision. Install kitchen cabinets that feature rollout drawers and easy-to-grip handles.

Remodeling for the Golden Years, continued...

- Use flat glass-top stoves, which are easy to clean, and make it easier to remove pots and pans; all appliance knobs are in the front for easy access.
- Remote controls have introduced a whole new world of accessibility and convenience. VCRs, music systems, garage door openers, touch-command and motion-sensing lighting systems, ceiling fans, sensor-controlled doors, and even microwave ovens.

Making your home more adaptable for comfortable living well into your golden years can be fun and rewarding. Let Access Ability Now, Inc. help you get there.