

Safety Top Priority Living At Home

By Genie Nowicki

Studies tell us that 87% of Americans want to continue to live in their homes as long as they can so let's take a practical look at this.

If you're considering making changes to your home, where do you start? With three simple steps: 1) consider the existing conditions; 2) determine the appropriate solutions; and 3) decide on a plan. How much you are willing and able to change? That answer is different for everyone. A design professional can assist you with this process.



Our environments can present us with obstacles and limitations or empower us. Let's start outside and work our way in. What are the obstacles when you arrive? Curbs, stairs, thresholds?

Some simple steps would include installing a railing to make stairs safer and adding lighted, easily visible house numbers to make it easier for friends and emergency personnel to find your home. Perhaps an incline walkway would create a safer and more inviting access to your home.

Inside, there are simple things that will provide safety and ease of use.

Safety should always be the first priority. Some of the items to consider are good lighting, de-cluttering, removing tripping hazards such as area rugs and extension cords and adding grab bars in bathrooms. (I see that look... grab bars come in many styles and colors and no longer create the institutional appearance that you may be concerned about.)

Now for some easy upgrades. Consider changing doorknobs to levers for ease of use. Faucets are also easier to use with lever controls

rather than round controls which are difficult with wet, soapy hands.

Of course, remodeling is the best way to make major changes. In the kitchen a remodel gives you the opportunity to improve aisle space and traffic flow, rearrange storage and add roll-outs for ease of use, install more intuitive appliances at a comfortable height, consider different counter heights and the possibility of seated use at the sink and cook top as well as easy maintenance materials.

In other areas of the house, wider hallways and doors make it easier to move without obstructions.



Clearly the most important room to remodel is the bathroom. Someone else can prepare meals for you but without a safe and accessible bathroom, you may be forced to move out of your home.

We often find this when someone has had surgery, hip or knee replacements and is unable to return home due to the lack of an accessible bathroom.

Some of the items to consider are the space around the toilet, size of the shower and a vanity counter 34" high that would allow use by a seated person as well as those who are standing.

In the shower, a hand-held showerhead on a bar provides flexible use by people of all heights, a bench seat allows a safe spot for bathing and grab bars are a must.

The ultimate in easy access is a curbless or roll-in shower. It's interesting that although they were originally thought of in terms of accessibility, curbless showers are now requested as a luxury item thanks to their popularity in high-end hotels and spas.

During the planning process, you might also consider how you would accommodate a caregiver. A guest room and guest bath would allow you to enjoy visitors and assistance when you need it.

Adding any of these features to your home will benefit everyone who uses it. Imagine a home that supports you, your family and friends regardless of your abilities!

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