

Accessible University

Home Modification Basics

If you can't locate a home that meets your accessibility needs, you will need to modify a home to accommodate the way you use your space, the assistive devices you use, and the people who are involved in your life. Below are the highlights of typical considerations and modifications in each area of your home.

Bathrooms

- Assess your bathroom's current layout, with special attention to door width, the location of your sink, toilet and shower, and the design of the shower enclosure
- Understand your use of a bathroom space, including ability to transfer and shower/bathing routines
- Renovations may include:
 - Converting a standard bathroom to a wet room
 - Changing an existing shower or tub into a roll-in shower or shower transfer space
 - Swapping out shower hardware for a telescoping shower head with single lever temperature and flow control
- Other aids like grab bars, transfer benches and transfer poles can all improve the safety of your bathroom
- Widening the interior doorway from a hall to a bathroom is an important consideration
- Changes to the structure of your vanity can create roll-under space for a wheelchair user. Accessibility can be improved by using hardware with lever handles and a shallower sink
- Assess if changes to the toilet are needed, either by adding a commode chair, or changing your toilet to a model with a higher seat

Bedroom

- Ensure there are sufficiently wide doorways (36") and adequate turning space (5' diameter)
- Place furniture to maximize accessibility
- Consider the possibility of creating bedroom space on a main floor
- Understand the safest methods for transferring in and out of bed and what equipment (if any) is needed

Living Spaces

- Choose furniture that is suitable for all household members – typically with firmer cushions and solid, wide arm rests
- Plan the space to avoid obstructions like area rugs and long, pooling curtains, and create as much open space for circulation as possible



Kitchen

- Consider circulation throughout kitchen space, including distance between counters
- Account for your ability to reach sink, stove, fridge and counter top, and whether these appliances can be moved, adjusted lower or higher, or changed out to increase accessibility
- Design cabinetry to allow access to drawers and shelves. Or, install pull-out or pull-down hardware to cabinets and drawers
- Consider modifications like lowering sections of countertop or removing cabinets so a user's legs and chair can roll underneath

Stairs

- Consider how much access you need to upper floors or basement floors, and the presence of other caregivers to do activities on those floors
- Assess how ambulatory a resident is, or if caregivers are consistently present to help with transfers
- If living on multiple floors is required, assess your use of other floors, ability to transfer and presence of caregivers as relevant factors in choosing an aid to move between floors. An occupational therapist may be best positioned to help you choose a solution
- Interior stairlifts, vertical lifts, inclined platform lifts, and elevators are all possibilities to solve challenges of multi-floor living

Entrances

- Consider your current ability to get safely in and out of your home, locations of all doors and their proximity to your sidewalk or driveway, and door width
- Landscaping and site changes may be a possibility, particularly for new construction, where a sidewalk or site grading can be used to create a barrier-free entrance
- Building a ramp is most suitable for situations where the threshold of the entrance door is less than 30" above the ground. Ramps are typically built with a 1:12 slope, with landing spaces of at least 5'x5' at the top and bottom of the ramp, as well as several other features
- Porch lifts are suitable where the height difference from the ground to the threshold of the door is greater than 30". Porch lifts can be installed at exterior doors or inside garages, and can be built into existing decks or patios. They require landing pads (5'x5') at the top and bottom, and several other features



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