

THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE WHEN BUYING A HOME

Owning a home is part of the American dream. However, as we get older, our American dream home may need to change to accommodate our changing bodies. Whether buying a new home or remodeling your existing home, keep in mind the fact that you may have special needs as you grow older.

The principle of Universal Design is meant to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible. Universal Design benefits people of all ages and abilities. When looking for that new home or thinking about remodeling your existing home, think about the following principles of Universal Design.

A home that has a ground-level entry way provides easy access in and out of the living space. Stairs leading up to the doorways may interfere with your ability to get in and out of your home. Make sure that the doorways in your home open wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair, if that ever becomes necessary. Also, check the width and slopes of the sidewalks around your home to ensure that they, too, will provide easy wheelchair access.

A single-story home allows for better maneuverability in the event you are ever physically impaired. Stairs pose a great risk for falling for persons of any age, especially older adults. Be sure that stairs are covered with a non-slip surface and that they are well-lighted. If you have a multi-story home, consider whether or not you have everything you need on the ground floor, such as a bedroom or bathroom, in the event you are unable to climb the stairs.

The kitchen is the new “family room” of today’s home so you should make sure your kitchen is accessible. Make pathways through the kitchen wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or walker. Also, make sure that if you are ever confined to a wheelchair that you will have access to your cabinets and drawers. Equip your sink with push/pull lever faucet handles rather than the standard knobs in case something like arthritis or stroke impairs your ability to grip things.

With regard to doors, cabinets and other things that may have knobs or pulls on them, try to avoid small knobs and grips. For door handles, choose “lever” type door handles that may be pushed down or lifted up to open. This will allow access even if you are impaired by arthritis or stroke. Choose handles rather than knobs for your kitchen cabinets and other cabinets in your home. Many home improvement stores carry pull-out trays that fit into your existing cabinets that allow easy access to your utensils without having to stoop down and dig through your cabinets.

Access to the bathroom in your home is paramount. Will you be able to get in and out of your bathroom if you are in a wheelchair or using a walker? Will you be able to reach your sink? Make sure that the doorway to your bathroom is wide there is plenty of floor space to move around inside of it. Handrails and grab bars may become important later in your life and you should ensure that the walls in your bathroom will support such devices. Most tubs and showers should be able to accommodate a chair or bench so that you are able to sit while bathing. Showers and tubs may be fitted with handheld shower heads that may be used if you are unable to stand in the shower.

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