

TIPS FOR BETTER UNIVERSAL DESIGN OF YOUR HOME

In the next 25 years the number of Americans over 50 will increase by over 47 million to a total of 115 million people. According to AARP, 83% of older Americans want to stay in their current homes for the rest of their lives. As you make modifications or repairs to your current home, include universal design features to make your home safer and more comfortable for people of all ages.

Universal design is the concept of making elements in your home friendly to all types of users. This is not just limited to people with acute physical disabilities. Universal design increases the usability of the home by people of all ages, sizes and abilities and enhances the ability of residents to live in their own home for as long as possible. More extensive accessible modifications designed to accommodate a specific user should be developed in close cooperation with a designer and builder to assure that all of the design requirements are met.

While better accessibility may be the initial reason for a project, the completed construction should enhance your home in every aspect. When done properly, universal design can enhance both the usability *and* aesthetics of your home. Universal design makes your home more livable and increases its value.

Keep the following universal design ideas in mind the next time you are considering a renovation:

- Bedroom
 - Consider providing a room on the ground floor that can be used as a bedroom along with a full bath to allow living entirely on one level, if necessary.
 - A separate dressing room with a vanity or lavatory provides easy access to clothing, minimizes the need to maneuver around the bed and, unlike the bathroom, can be designed with warm, soft finishes such as carpeting.
- Kitchen
 - It's tough to live independently if you can't fix your own meals
 - Vary the height of countertops so the whole family can use them.
 - Install full-extension drawers and pull-out shelves in lower cabinets. Make the cabinets work for you not against you.
 - Replace standard dual range with separate cooktop and wall-mounted oven. Use a side-hinged door for the oven with a pull-out shelf below. If the cooktop has level burners then it's easier to transfer items between them. Front or side mounted controls eliminate the need to reach over the burners or hot items.
 - Replace top-bottom refrigerator/freezer with side-by-side unit so that both spaces are accessible to all users.
 - Arrange the kitchen to reduce heavy lifting. For example, place the cooktop next to the sink so that you can use a spray attachment to fill pots after you place them on the stove.
 - Install task lighting over work surfaces such as the kitchen counter, chopping block, stove and sink.
 - Install dishwasher 8" higher to reduce bending.
- Bathroom
 - Universal design can help make it easier for mothers to bathe a young child and help avoid the difficulties of an older person with mobility problems to get in and out of a bathtub.
 - Install a hand-held shower with a sliding bar. This is convenient for people sitting or standing as well as for bathing others.
 - Install grab bars to help get in and out of the tub or to use the toilet. Grab bars now come in a variety of styles so they can fit in with your bathroom's décor.
 - Install bathtubs with built-in transfer benches and showers with fold-down shower seats. These help people who tire when standing for long periods to bathe and

- provide users and caregivers a place to sit while giving a bath, washing their feet or shaving their legs.
 - Install an elevated toilet in at least one bathroom. These toilets put less strain on your back and are more convenient for people who have trouble bending.
 - If your bathroom has multiple sinks, consider varying heights to accommodate a variety of users.
- Doorways-Stairways-Hallways
 - Change doorknobs to lever door handles. These are easier to operate for everyone from people with arthritis to someone who has their arms full or has their hands wet.
 - Widen doorways and hallways to at least 36". This is more convenient in moving furniture and helps people who need more room to maneuver.
 - Use nightlights.
 - Install handrails on every stair.
 - Make sure stairways are well lit.
 - Lower floor thresholds or transitions to no more than 1/2".
- Storage
 - Put a light in your closet so that you can see items more easily.
 - Use pull out drawers or bins to make the most out of your storage space. Make sure to use d-shaped or u-shaped handles.
 - Install adjustable height closet rods so that they are accessible to people of all heights and abilities.
 - Shallow shelves on the inside of pantry or cabinet doors make items easier to identify and access.
- Outside
 - Create a barrier free entrance to your home for your family and guests
 - Replace steps with gradual paths (5% slope or less), if possible.
 - Provide a covered overhang at the door.
 - Make sure the doorway is at least 36" wide.
 - Provide an exterior shelf or table where you can place packages or grocery bags while opening the door.
 - Consider installing an intercom and view panel at your front door for greater security. Make sure that the view panel is at a usable height.
 - Re-do sidewalks and driveways to patch cracks and holes as well as to provide a textured, non-slip surface.
 - Make sure that outside walkways, stairs and entrances are well lit. Motion, sound or darkness detectors work well to save money and add convenience.
 - Install an automatic garage door.
- Miscellaneous
 - Raise electrical outlets to 27" above the floor to reduce bending.
 - Get telephones with a volume control feature that is easily adjustable.
 - Replace standard light switches with rocker switches that are easier to use.
- Hire a design professional to make sure you get the best result for your money.

References for additional information:

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Written by Vincent Ciccarelli, a partner at the architecture firm of Insight Architects.

www.insightarch.com