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Changes to Make Homes More Accessible

The elderly and disabled often need to have living areas in their homes physically or structurally modified to improve their quality of life. Before you make home modifications, evaluate the current and future needs of the homeowner by going through the house room by room and answering a series of questions to highlight where changes might be made. You can use the checklists below to help you conduct a review for modifications that could improve the quality of life for disabled and elderly residents and visitors. Appliances, the Kitchen and the Bathroom

Are the cabinet doorknobs easy to use?

- Are the stove controls easy to use and clearly marked?
- Are the faucets easy to use?
- Are there grab-bars where needed?
- Are all appliances and utensils conveniently and safely located?
- Can the oven and refrigerator be opened easily?
- Can you sit down while working?
- Can you get into and out of the bathtub or shower easily?
- Is the kitchen counter height and depth comfortable for you?
- Is the water temperature regulated to prevent scalding or burning?
- Would you benefit from having convenience items such as a handheld showerhead, a garbage disposal or a trash compactor?

Closets and Storage Spaces

Are the closets and storage areas conveniently located?

- Are the closet shelves too high?
- Can you reach items in the closet easily?
- Is there enough storage space?
- Can you get the maximum use out of the storage space, including saving space with special closet shelf systems and other products?

Doors and Windows

- Are the doors and windows easy to open and close?
- Are the door locks sturdy and easy to operate?
- Are the doors wide enough to accommodate a walker or wheelchair?
- Do the doors have peepholes or viewing panels? If so, are they at the correct height for easy use?
- Is there a step up or down at the entrance to the home? If so, is the door threshold too high or low for easy use?
- Is there enough space for someone to move around while opening or closing the doors?

The Driveway and Garage

- Does the garage door have an automatic opener?
- Is a parking space always available?
- Are there parking spaces close to the entrance of the home?

Electrical Outlets, Switches and Safety Devices

- Are light or power switches easy to turn on and off?
- Are electrical outlets easy to reach?
- Are the electrical outlets properly grounded to prevent shocks?
- Are any extension cords in good condition?
- Can the doorbell be heard in every part of the house?
- Are there smoke detectors throughout the home?
- Is there an alarm system?
- Is a telephone readily available for emergencies?
- Would it help to have an assistive device to make it easier to hear and talk on the telephone?

Floors

Are all of the floors on the same level?

- Are steps up and down marked in some way?
- Are all floor surfaces safe and covered with non-slip or non-skid materials?
- Are there scatter rugs or doormats that could be hazardous?

Hallways, Steps and Stairways

- Are the hallways and stairs in good condition?
- Do all of the hallways and stairs have smooth, safe surfaces?
- Do the stairs have steps that are big enough for entire feet?
- Are there handrails on both sides of the stairway?
- Are the stair rails wide enough to be grasped securely?
- Could the home use a ramp to replace the inside or outside stairs or steps?

Lighting and Ventilation

- Are there night-lights where they are needed?
- Is the lighting in each room sufficient for the use of the room?
- Is the lighting bright enough to ensure safety?
- Is each room well ventilated with good air circulation?

Once you have explored all the areas of your home that could benefit from remodeling, make a list of the most obvious dangers and potential problems. Then create a list of possible solutions to these problems and set about making the necessary changes and modifications.

Some content in this document was created by the Administration on Aging, part of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. Their Web site is located at www.aoa.gov.

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