

Update your home for safety and convenience

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Most families experience temporary or permanent physical problems, from a sprained ankle to natural aging, that make it difficult to live safely and conveniently in their home. There are easy and inexpensive ways you can update and arrange your home to make life easier for all ages and abilities.

Changing housing needs. According to an AARP survey, over two-thirds of aging parents believed they would be able to stay in their home with only minimum assistance from family and friends. In reality, most homes are not designed to allow the elderly to successfully age in place. To plan for changing housing needs:

- Ask questions and listen.
- Observe which activities and chores are becoming difficult or unsafe to do.
- Problem-solve together to identify one or two major problems on which to focus.
- Remember to put safety first.

Universal design features. Universal design features and products help make your home safer and more convenient for everyone, even when needs and abilities change. Evaluate your home to see if it provides the basic features of universal design:

1. **One no-step entrance with level landing** 5-ft. x 5-ft. minimum
2. **Spaces for eating, bathing and sleeping on an accessible level.**
3. **Wide doorways** 36 in.; 32-in. minimum on accessible level
4. **Wide halls and pathways** 42 in.; 36-in. minimum on accessible level
5. **Extra floor space** 60-in. turning radius in the accessible bath and activity areas

It is less costly to include universal design features during building or remodeling, but they can be added to your existing home. An attractive, no-step entry, providing easy access for strollers or wheelchairs, can be made by grading and landscaping instead of building a ramp. Check local permits before home modification projects.

Simple solutions for safety. Inexpensive universal design products can prevent home accidents and are convenient for everyone to use:

1. **Handrails on both sides of stairs with light switches at top and bottom.**
2. **Lever door handles (easier for a child or when hands are full).**
3. **Reinforced grab bars at tub, shower, and commode (new grab bars match any décor).**
4. **Single-control lever faucets (easier to use and adjust temperature).**
5. **Hand-held shower head on adjustable slide.**
6. **Non-slip flooring (with no throw rugs).**

For more information: Universal design information is available from several sources including:

University of Missouri Extension. www.extension.missouri.edu.

Iowa State University, www.extension.iastate.edu/housing/elderly/universal-design;

The Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University, www.design.ncsu.edu:8120/cud;

AARP, www.aarp.org;

Reference: Mary H. Yearns, *A Home for All Ages: Convenient, comfortable and attractive.* (March 1997). HDSS-H-294. Iowa State University Extension, Ames, Iowa.