



ELDER UPDATE



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INDEPENDENT LIVING

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RENOVATING FOR LIFE

Home Fix-ups for Lifelong Independence

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What does home mean to you? If you're like most of us, it's the one place that is a unique expression of yourself. And whether you have lived there for decades or just moved in, you want the option to live at home on your own terms.

Recently a trend called Universal Design has caught on to keep us living independently and allow us to "age-in-place." Creating an age-friendly home is a process that is most successful when you focus on how you really live in your home.

Take a walk through your house, assessing each room (and include the exterior) with these factors in mind:

- Day-to-day safety and potential for falls
- Ease of mobility
- Convenience for activities of daily living like eating, dressing, and toileting
- Access to communication and technology

Many possibilities will occur to you immediately.

The Question Is Where to Begin?

Start with basic falls prevention. Falls are the number one reason older adults enter the emergency room. The essentials are grab bars in the bathroom, thick carpet padding, de-cluttering, and no scatter rugs. Take a trip to the home-goods store for snow-melting exterior mats (if wintering in a cold climate) and non-slip bathroom and front door mats.

Make sure there is good lighting in every room and that colors contrast. It's almost impossible to see a black chair on a black rug in the dark.

Think through your daily habits. Do you leave the stove on? Make bath water too hot? New safety devices will automatically shut off your stove and warn you about water temperature. A mobile phone app is available that turns up heat and turns lights off and on from outside the home.

Mobility

Better mobility may simply mean moving the bedroom to the first floor. But, if you use a wheelchair or scooter, you will need wide doors and big

turning spaces. A universal design pro can make barrier-free living beautiful.

Look for construction trades people who are Certified Aging in Place Specialists, a designation of the National Association of Home Builders in collaboration with the AARP. They know how to properly install barrier-free and safety features, for example making sure to reinforce the wall behind grab bars.

Bath and Kitchen

When it comes to activities of daily living, freedom comes down to accessibility. Hydraulic cabinets that change heights, barrier-free showers, and roll-in tubs are now available at big box stores as well as through custom designers. Remember your dressing room and closets: use levers on doors instead of knobs for easy turning and hang rods lower so you don't strain to reach them.

The Wired House

The right communication technology can save your life and keep you socially connected. For most people, the centerpiece of communication is the telephone. New technologies feature big print, big buttons, hearing enhancement, and simple navigation. Look for age-friendly, multi-purpose technology that is easy to see, hear, use, and afford.

If you are willing to be monitored, consider sensors in the rooms you use the most. They report your activities – getting out of bed, using the bathroom, opening the refrigerator, etc., – to a designated family member who could make an emergency call if activity is low.

Creating an age-friendly home is a process that is most successful when you focus on how you really live in your home.

Adriane Berg works with VTech, and for more information on available products, call VTech at 1-800-595-9511 or visit www.vtechphones.com/careline.

Make Your Home a WATCH HOUSE

WATCH is a mnemonic device to remember the five essentials of independent living. Make your own checklist:

W **WORRY-FREE** – grab bars, no-slip flooring, security lighting, personal emergency response systems, security alarms, excellent lighting, falls-absorbing padding

A **AGILE** – first floor living, chair lifts, hand rails, big spaces around toilets and doorways if there is a wheelchair in use, barrier free showers, ramps, door levers, low closet racks and bars, hydraulic cabinets, roll-in bathtub

T **TECH SMART** – easy-to-use computer, big button phone, big button TV remote control, touch screens, telehealth docking stations, companion robot

C **COST EFFICIENT** – zoned heating, solar heating, weatherproofing, insulation

H **HEALTHY** – improved air quality, allergen free fabrics, easy-to-reach filtered water to stay hydrated, exercise equipment, a relaxing space for stress reduction, digital health-docking stations, raised garden beds

