

VTech Guest Article

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, no scatter rugs and de-cluttering. Take a trip to the home goods store for non-slip bathroom and front door mats and snow-melting exterior 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 put 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 such as 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 custom designers. And remember your dressing room and closets. Use levers on doors instead of knobs for easy turning. 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. VTech CareLine™ features big print, big buttons, hearing enhancement, and above all, it's simple to navigate. VTech CareLine also offers a pendant that can call two numbers programmed for emergencies, such as 911 and a responsible relative. CareLine is a standard of what to look for in all age-friendly technology: easy to see, hear, use, multi-purpose, affordable and attractive.

If you are willing to be monitored, consider sensors in the rooms you use the most. They report your activities – got out of bed, used the bathroom, opened the refrigerator – to a designated family member and make an emergency call if activity is low.

Check out our resource list and stay independent!

Resources List

- AARP -- <http://www.AARPorg/home-family/your-home/>
- American Institute of Architects -- www.AIA.org (find age-in-place specialists)
- Americans with Disabilities Act -- www.ADA.gov (offers online diagrams for accessible bathrooms and kitchens)
- Benefits Check Up -- www.BENEFITSCHECKUP.org (get a free personal entitlement report)
- Leading Age -- www.LEADINGAGE.org (see pictures of the IDEA House, a 2600 sq foot age-in-place home)
- National Aging in Place Council -- www.AGINGINPLACE.org (hints and tips)
- National Association of Home Builders -- www.NAHB.org (find CAPS professionals)
- National Council on Aging -- www.NCOA.org (learn what government programs are available)
- Veterans Administration -- www.BENEFITS.VA.gov/homeloans/adaptedhousing.asp

Make yours a “WATCH” House:

WATCH is my mnemonic 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