Home Modifications for Safer Aging in Place

Some simple home modifications can make for safer and more comfortable living at home.

Entries and Doorways

- ❍ There should be at least one no-step entry to the house with a cover
- ❍ Outdoor walkway should be well lit
- ❍ Install a sensor light focusing on the front-door lock
- ❍ Use non-slip flooring in foyer
- ❍ Make sure there is a surface outside to place packages on when opening the door
- ❍ There needs to be 32 inches of clear width, which requires a 36-inch door
- ❍ Use a levered door hardware versus a knob

Windows

- ❍ Make sure there are plenty of windows for natural light, which should be kept clean and with curtains pulled back during daylight hours
- ❍ Include lowered windows or taller windows with lower sill height
- ❍ Use easy to operate window hardware

Counters and Cabinets

- ❍ Make sure there is wall support and provision for adjustable and/or varied height counters and removable base cabinets
- ❍ Install open under-counter seated work areas
- ❍ Use accented stripes on edge of countertops to provide visual orientation to the workspace
- ❍ Include a base cabinet with roll out trays and Lazy Susans
- ❍ Use pull-down shelving
- ❍ Use glass-front cabinet doors and/or open shelving for easy access to frequently used items
- ❍ Include loop handles for easy grip and pull

RESPONSIVE HOME HEALTH
"RESPONDING WITH CARE SINCE 1994"

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Faucets

- ❍ Use lever or pedal-controlled handles
- ❍ Install thermostatic or anti-scald controls

Appliances

- ❍ Make sure they utilize easy to read controls
- ❍ Use a front loading laundry machine on the first floor of the home
- ❍ Use a microwave oven at counter height or in the wall
- ❍ Use a side-by-side refrigerator/freezer
- ❍ Install an electric cook top with level burners for safety in transferring between the burners, front controls and a downdraft feature to pull heat away from the user, as well as a light to indicate when the surface is hot

Fixtures

- ❍ Use grab bars in the shower and/or tub
- ❍ If a stand-up shower is used, it should be curbless and a minimum of 36 inches wide
- ❍ If a bathtub is used, obtain a portable transfer bench, install a bath lift or purchase a tub with a door to aid with getting into and out of the tub
- ❍ Use a fold down seat in the shower
- ❍ Install adjustable/handheld showerheads, 6-foot hose
- ❍ Make sure there is a light in the shower stall
- ❍ The toilet should be 2 ½ inches higher than a standard toilet (17 to 19 inches) or height-adjustable
- ❍ Design of the toilet paper holder should allow rolls to be changed with one hand
- ❍ Use slip-resistant flooring in the bathroom, tub and shower

Stairways, Lifts and Elevators

- ❍ Make sure there are adequate hand rails on both sides of stairway, 1 ¼-inch diameter
- ❍ Increase visibility of stairs through contrast strip on top and bottom stairs, color contrast between treads and risers on stairs and use of lighting
- ❍ Multi-story homes may provide either a pre-framed shaft (i.e. stacked closets) for a future elevator, or stairway width must be a minimum of 4 feet to allow space for a lift

Ramps

- ❍ Slope should be no greater than 1 inch rise for each 12 inches in length, with adequate handrails
- ❍ Provide a 5-foot landing at the entrance
- ❍ Include 2-inch curbs for safety

Closets and Shelving

- ❍ Install adjustable closet rods and shelves
- ❍ Use easy-to-reach lighting in closets
- ❍ Include easy-open doors that do not obstruct access
- ❍ Make sure closets are uncluttered, organized and easily accessible, with items off the floor, including shoes
- ❍ Shelves should be no more than 18 inches deep
- ❍ Lower drawers should be deep and upper drawers should be shallow

Electrical, Lighting, Safety and Security

- ❍ Make sure there are light switches by each entrance to hallways and rooms
- ❍ Use light receptacles with at least 2 bulbs in vital places (exits, bathroom)
- ❍ Add more incandescent lights to the home
- ❍ Add nightlights in areas one might walk at nighttime, such as bedroom, hallway and bathroom
- ❍ Light switches, thermostats and other environmental controls should be placed in accessible locations no higher than 48 inches from floor
- ❍ Use easy-to-see and read pre-programmed thermostats
- ❍ Clear access space in front of switches and controls
- ❍ Use rocker or touch light switches
- ❍ Include an audible and visual strobe light system to indicate when the doorbell, telephone or smoke or CO2 detectors have been activated
- ❍ Install a high-tech security/intercom system that can be monitored, with the heating, air conditioning and lighting, from any TV in the house
- ❍ Use a flashing porch light or 911 switch
- ❍ Make sure the home is wired for security

Flooring

- ❍ Use smooth, non-glare, slip-resistant surfaces, interior and exterior
- ❍ If carpeted, use low (less than ½ inch high pile) density, with a firm pad
- ❍ Use color/texture contrast to indicate change in surface levels

When care is needed, Responsive Home Health can help, not only with a qualified caregiver, but by coordinating community services so living at home longer is possible. We can also provide a free in-home safety assessment and make recommendations for comfortably aging in place.

Source: *AARP and Toolbase Services*