



Livable Homes

Evaluating Our Homes for Comfort, Safety and Independence

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Most of us want to remain in our own homes as long as possible. As we get older, doing so may be more challenging without a successful fit between our home environment and our needs. When a fit does not occur, physical differences become barriers to independent living.

Top 3 Reasons

for Making Your Home Accessible and Safe

To stimulate your thinking and assist you in exploring the importance of your home environment, take some time to list the reasons for making your home accessible and safe.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

A home that is designed to accommodate our changing needs can help prevent these limitations in lifestyle and activities. This type of design, referred to as universal design, is about creating or remodeling a home that is adaptable, flexible, safe and easy to use for all residents and visitors, regardless of age or ability. We all can benefit by incorporating universal design features in our home, whether we are building a new home or remodeling our existing home.

Universal Design Features

- No-step entrance
- Main living areas on entry floor level (kitchen, full bath and bedroom)
- Wide doorways and hallways
- Lever door and faucet handles
- Multiheight kitchen countertops
- Kitchen and bathroom cabinets/shelves that are easy to reach
- Well-lit hallways and stairways
- A walk-in bathtub or shower with a nonslip bottom or floor
- Blocking in the bathroom walls so grab bars can be added as needed
- Secure handrails on both sides of stairways

Home Modification

Many no-cost or low-cost modifications can be made to your home to make it more comfortable, safe and accessible. Most of the supplies or products can be purchased at a home improvement center or your local hardware store.

You also have different ways to get minor modifications done, such as doing it yourself or

contacting a community agency or faith-based group. For bigger projects, such as widening doorways and hallways, the modification will be more costly and require hiring a contractor.

The NDSU Extension Service has home modification checklists to help you decide if your home meets your needs, along with recommended modifications. Go to www.ag.ndsu.edu/family. Also, AARP's website, www.aarp.org, has many tips on home modification, hiring a contractor and much more.



Prevent Problems That Could Lead to Injury or Loss of Independence

The majority of falls (55 percent) among older people occur inside the home and an additional 23 percent take place outside, near the home. A number of potential home hazards are ones you can find and fix.

Floors

- **Do you have throw rugs on the floor?**
Remove the rugs or use nonslip backing or double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- **Do you have to walk over or around cords or wires?**
Tape or coil the cords/wires next to the wall so you don't trip on them.
- **Do you have objects or clutter on the floor?**
Keep objects off the floor.

Stairs/Steps

- **Are the handrails loose or available only on one side of the stairs?**
Fix loose handrails and install them on both sides of the stairs.
- **Do you have light switches at the top and bottom of the stairs?**
Have an electrician install switches at the top and bottom of the stairs. Get light switches that glow.
- **Is the carpet on the steps ripped or loose?**
Fix the carpet so it is firmly attached to each step.

Home Modification

1. Conduct a home modification checklist (www.ag.ndsu.edu/family) to determine what needs to get done.
2. Do it yourself or contact a community agency or faith-based group.
3. Hire a contractor (www.aarp.org for tips on hiring a contractor).

- **Do you have a light over the stairway?**
Have an electrician put in lights at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- **Do you have clutter or objects on the stairs?**
Pick up items from the stairs and always keep them clear.

Kitchen

- **Do you use a chair instead of a stepstool?**
Use a steady stepstool with a grab bar.
- **Are items you use often on the high shelves?**
Move items used often to lower shelves (above waist level).

Bathrooms

- **Do you need support when using the bathroom?**
Install grab bars inside and outside of the tub/shower and next to the toilet.
- **Is the floor of the tub or shower slippery?**
Place a nonslip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub/shower for better grip.

Bedrooms

- **Is the light by the bed hard to reach?**
Put the lamp close to the bed so it is easy to reach.
- **Is the path from the bed to the bathroom dark?**
Use a night-light that turns on automatically after dark.

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