

Home Modification Options

Many seniors choose to stay at home as long as possible, and many of them make modifications to their homes to make them more livable and safer. The industry of home modification for seniors is growing rapidly, and the concept of universal-design—designing houses from the beginning to accommodate people of all ages and abilities—is becoming popular. When modifying your home or your elder's home, be sure that all support rails and bars are installed correctly and are strong enough to support a person's full weight.

STAIRS

Stairs are potentially one of the most dangerous parts of any household, and for the elderly and disabled they are even more so. Some possible modifications for stairs include:

- **Treads and Risers:** Risers (the height of each stair) should not be more than 6–7 inches, and outside risers should not be more than 4 inches. The tread should be wide enough to allow your foot to rest comfortably without extending over the edge.
- **Handrails:** These should be installed on both sides of all stairways, or if that isn't possible, in the center of a wide stairway.
- **Lighting:** Should be indirect and not glaring, and should shine on all steps equally, at both the top and the bottom.



RAMPS

Ramps are particularly good for people in wheelchairs, but if they are improperly designed they can be dangerous for others. Some tips for ramp design include the following:

- **Slope:** Exterior ramps should slope at a maximum 1-inch rise for every 20 inches of length, and interior ramps should slope 1–12 inches.
- **Landings:** Landings should be installed at the top and bottom of every ramp, and in the middle if a ramp changes direction or rises more than 3 feet. All landings should generally be at least 5 feet long.
- **Handrails:** Like stairs, ramps need handrails installed on both sides.
- **Surfaces:** Ramps should have a non-slip surface, such as paint mixed with sand, rolled roofing material, or broom-finished concrete.

KITCHENS

- **Work Triangle:** Arrange food preparation area, mixing area, and cooking area in a linear or triangular pattern for easy access.
- **Refrigerators and Freezers:** Use side-by-side refrigerator/freezers.
- **Counters:** Use adjustable countertops, corner counters, pull-out surfaces and stools.
- **Sinks:** Use racks in deep sinks, and use a free-standing sink for wheelchair access.
- **Stove:** Use staggered burners, a mirror above the stove, and range controls at the front or side of the range.
- **Oven:** Use wall-mounted ovens with side-opening doors.

BATHROOMS

- **Sinks:** To accommodate a person in a wheelchair, a sink should have around 27–30 inches underneath—preferably with no cabinet, which can block access.
- **Faucets:** Replace knob-type faucets with double levers or cross knobs, or use single-lever faucets.
- **Toilets:** Adjust the height according to the needs of the user. Grab bars can also be installed surrounding a toilet.
- **Tubs and Showers:** Decide on a tub or shower—depending on the person's needs. Install single-level faucet and antiscald temperature controls. Also use non-skid strips, grab bars, and adequate lighting.

