



Universal Design

Housing Solutions for All Ages and Abilities

Implementing Home Modifications

Many changes associated with implementing Universal Design features are fairly minor, inexpensive, and require little effort (i.e., changing round door knobs to lever door handles). Other changes, however, are more significant, more expensive, and may require a professional contractor (i.e., installing a roll-in shower). Once a decision has been made to make modifications to your home, the next two steps are to decide on the extent of change you will make and to identify specific ways in which to implement these changes.

Deciding on what home modifications to make

Once you recognize that your home or the home of a loved one is in need of modifications, whether for safety concerns or to enable them to age in place, it is important to carefully consider both the personal abilities and limitations of the person who lives in this home as well as which features in the home require attention.

An “assessment” is a comprehensive review of an individual’s mobility, sensory, environmental, and financial condition. This type of tool can assist in identifying what areas need the most attention

and what home modifications might improve someone’s quality of life or make their environment more accessible and comfortable.

An assessment conducted by a professional can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days to conduct and usually involves a fee. Individuals can also conduct their own assessments but in order to do this they will need to obtain an assessment tool from an occupational therapist or local Area Agency on Aging. Alternatively, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) web site (www.aarp.org) has an assessment tool that can be printed out free of charge (<http://www.aarp.org/confacts/caregive/assess.html>).

Often just buying small portable items can enhance safety and comfort. These items can be bought in a home improvement store or a comprehensive drug store and taken home and used immediately. Someone who is handy around the house can do many minor projects easily. Projects that involve the replacement of fixtures and appliances, however, may require a professional. Finally, major projects that require the installation of a first floor bathroom or the modification of

doorways may require a building permit and skilled contractor.

Locating home modification or adaptive equipment products

Because working with adaptive equipment and universal design features may not be an area of expertise for the contractor you hire, you may have to find some of the products yourself. The items may not be available or easily found in a retail store. However, there are a number of ways to find and obtain these products:

- Several companies have catalogs from which you can purchase products directly.
- Many companies now have active web sites where you can buy Universal Design products¹.
- Retail stores that feature home improvement and remodeling products may carry these products or be willing to special order them.

Plan and carry out the installation

- When you have decided exactly what you want to do, and the size of the job required, assess your own or a family member's skill to accomplish the job. If you have a modest income, you may be eligible for a home assessment/home modification program in your community or county.
- Check with your local Area Office on Aging, senior center, independent living

center, or Community Action Agency for information on home modification programs available in your community.

- Contact your Local Community Development Department. Many cities and towns use Community Development Block Grants to assist individuals in maintaining and upgrading their homes.
- Ask local Lenders and Banks about loan options. Some lenders offer Home Equity Conversion Mortgages (HECM's) that allow homeowners to turn the value of their home into cash, without having to move or make regular loan payments.

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Sources

The DoAble Renewable Home: Making Your Home Fit Your Needs (D12470), American Association of Retired Persons. Price: Free (single copies).

Home Modification and Repair, Administration on Aging. Retrieved February 25, 2002 from the World Wide Web <http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/eldractn/homemodf.html>

¹ See the "Catalogue and Internet Sources" handout included in this resource packet.

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<http://ohioline.osu.edu>