

## Update Your Home for a Lifetime of Living

### The Independence Myth

Few experiences are more devastating for an older person than the realization that, due to physical limitations, he must move from his home. Over 2/3 of aging parents believe they will be able to rely on family and friends with tasks that allow them to stay in their home, (AARP, 2001). In reality, staying independent requires careful planning.

### Changing Needs

Every family wants a home that is convenient, comfortable, and will adapt to changing needs. AARP reports 89 percent of elderly desire to live in their homes as long as possible; however, most home are not designed to successfully age in place. With careful planning, homes can be adapted and arranged to enable everyone to live independently.

### Five Basic Universal Design Features

Universal design features are critical to maintaining an independent lifestyle. They provide practical solutions for comfort and convenience, and adapt to changing needs as family members age. The 5 basic features of Universal Design are:

1. At least one no-step entrance.
2. Spaces for eating, bathing and sleeping on an accessible level
3. Wide doorways (36", 32" minimum)
4. Wide halls & pathways (42", 36"min)
5. Extra floor space (60"turning radius)

Homes with Universal Design features are attractive, spacious and create an accessible home for friends and family. A no-step entry that provides easy access for a wheelchair or a stroller can be added by careful grading and landscaping instead of building a ramp. It is less costly to include universal design features during building or remodeling, but they can be added to any home.

### Simple Solutions Increase Safety

Simple alterations can prevent one-third of all home accidents. These changes not only increase your safety, but enhance your comfort and increase the likelihood of your remaining independent in your home. Many features just make good sense.

- Handrails on both sides of all steps (inside and outside)
- Lever door handles are great for people with poor hand strength, or when carrying a bag of groceries or a child.
- Floors and bathtubs with non-slip surfaces help everyone stay on their feet.
- Secure area rugs with double-sided tape
- Brighter bulbs in all settings
- Nightlights in all areas of night activity;

### Communication: Raising Housing Issues

Making family decisions related to housing is often challenging. The best thing family members can do is to talk and listen to each other. Learn by asking questions and by problem solving together. Options increase when discussions about housing choices begin before a crisis develops. When discussing your housing situation with your family, identify one or two major problems to focus your attention. Identify the outcome(s) each person wants and determine who needs to be involved to achieve desired results. If professional help is needed an Occupational Therapist can help assess the situation and match physical and cognitive abilities to their physical environment.

For more information contact: Rebecca Blocker, Housing & Environmental Design Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, 573-756-4539, e-mail [blocker@missouri.edu](mailto:blocker@missouri.edu) or check our website at <http://extension.missouri.edu>. University Extension is an ADA/equal opportunity institution.