

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Keeping Your Home Safe & Accessible

By Karen and Gregg Frank

Home. It is the dwelling where we rest our head at night. However, for many it represents so much more. It is where we raise our family, share time with grandchildren and where we create most of our fondest memories. As we get older or experience some medical compromises, our bodies and minds are impacted. Physical impairments can evolve that can alter strength, balance and flexibility. This implants the ability to walk, shower and perform daily activities and unfortunately increase the risk of life altering falls. Our ability to remain in our homes is threatened. The following recommendations may be the solutions crucial to remaining in our homes safely for many years to come.

Falls. In the blink of an eye a sudden fall can change our lives forever. Medication interactions, altered vision, inappropriate footwear, and decreased cognition are just some of many factors that should be evaluated by a competent professional to help reduce falls in the home. Decrease clutter, abolish throw rugs, and assure flooring is slip resistant. Electrical cords should not cross walkways. Door thresholds should be made flush with the adjacent flooring surfaces to allow transitions for walking when utilizing assistive devices or mobilizing a

wheelchair. Creating a well-lit environment with strategically placed motion sensor lighting will also undoubtedly result in reduced falls.



Many catastrophic injuries occur from falls on stairs. The solution may be as basic as adding an additional stair-rail. When you think railings, don't just limit them to the inside of your home. Railings can be added by a front or back step or along the walkways that lead to your home. Having something to grab on to can reduce risk.

The large majority of falls occur in the bathroom. Well placed grab bars in the shower, preferably at least one vertical to enter and one horizontal on the far wall is advised. It is imperative that these grab bars be installed by a skilled carpenter to assure they will remain anchored when they are needed most. In addition, a wall mounted soap/shampoo pump to replace the stockpile of product bottles will eliminate the inevitable necessity

of bending over to pick up items on a slippery surface. Shower benches and walk-in tubs can also make a difference.

Disabilities. As we get older we are often exposed to medical setbacks that result in disability. Home modifications may be necessary to create home accessibility. Ramps, stairlifts, vertical platform lifts, elevators... are all examples of solutions that can bridge the difference between moving and remaining in your own home. It is imperative to consult with a professional who understands the functional abilities of the disabled individual as well as the caregivers interacting within the home. Methods of transferring, degree of assistance needed, strength of caregiver, and many other factors need to be considered before investing in function enhancing modifications. Stairlifts can be life altering. However, if the disabled person is large and requires a great amount of assistance then possibly a vertical platform lift or ramp would be a better choice. Ramps and stair-lifts can often be rented as well as purchased for short term and long term requirements. Door widening or off-set hinges can address the difficulty of getting a wheelchair through a narrow doorway. Additionally, a raised toilet can reduce efforts of getting on and off the toilet.



The right choice of home modification can result in many years of safe and functional living in the home.

Think ahead. If you are moving or renovating your home, keep universal design in mind. Limit barriers, create wheelchair friendly doorways and avoid multi-levels if at all possible. The most important thing to keep in mind is to be proactive. Avoid injury by reducing fall hazards.

Remain active. Do not allow fear of falling to keep you from moving. Minimizing movement leads to deconditioning, reduced strength, endurance, balance and flexibility which thereby increases the chance of falling. If falls are reduced, and a safe home is created, chances of living in the home you love becomes your reality.

Karen Frank, a physical therapist and Gregg Frank, an occupational therapist, are the owners of Back Home Safely, a home modification company whose mission is to create safe and accessible homes with the goal of allowing people to age in place. Back Home Safely offers free home evaluation by a licensed professional and has carpenters who can complete any projects requested. For more information, call 973-219-4147 or go to: www.BackHomeSafely.com.