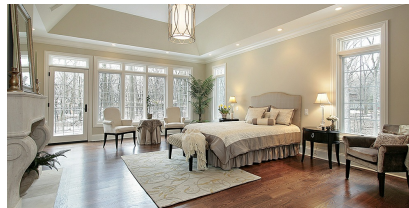


Home: Ideas to Age in Place

[healthyaging.net/magazine/winter-2020/how-to-set-up-your-home-to-age-in-place](https://www.healthyaging.net/magazine/winter-2020/how-to-set-up-your-home-to-age-in-place) *Link:*



By Karen Frank, PT

If you're preparing for retirement, you may be planning how to spend your precious time: taking up a sport, traveling more, or investing your time in your friends and family. But is a home remodel on the list? If not, it may be the perfect time to consider what minor updates you can make to your home to keep you safe and sound well into your golden years.

1. Plan for the Long Term

According to an AARP study, nearly half of Americans over 50 years old plan to stay in their homes and never move. If that's the case, then consider what changes you can make to enable aging in place.

This could be a significant change, such as moving a master bedroom from the second floor to the first, or a small change, such as reinforcing a railing. Make a plan that can help you over the long term. Being proactive can help you transition in place and protect against life-altering injuries.



*Showers with low or no curb are smart designs, especially for older adults. Design by MichaelMenn.com.
Photo: Dennis Jourdan*

2. Exploring the Remodel

If remodeling your home is on your to-do list, keep mobility in mind. Aesthetics and functional use of your environment are important but don't forget to focus on universal design.

Universal design is the method of creating a space in a commercial building or home to make it accessible for any person, regardless of disability or age. Parts of your home such as stairs, doorways, and tubs can all become a barrier for someone with mobility issues. Remember that planning for an accessible home is not only important for you as you age, but also for friends and family visiting and spending time in your home.

Here are ways to alter your home so that you stay safe in it:

- Avoid thresholds between rooms.
- Create wide doorways.
- If possible, keep the main living spaces on the same level.
- Keep your laundry room on the same floor as your master bedroom.
- Avoid thick shag rugs. Opt instead for smooth hardwood, tile, or low-pile carpet.
- Have solid, strong, and graspable railings on all stairways.
- Create barrier-free showers and install ADA-height toilets.

Keeping your home free of challenging transitions will enable you to move throughout your environment with confidence. If universal design is exercised, as you age, the transitions from room to room, in and out of the shower, or in and out of the home will continue to be seamless. You'll have less fear moving throughout your environment, which will keep you more active, maintaining your strength and endurance and keeping you healthy.

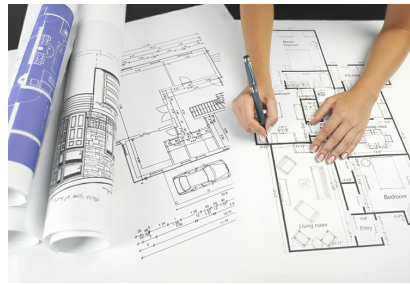
Also, if medical conditions become present in your life, and your functional abilities become challenged, items such as grab bars, stairlifts, elevators, and ramps can be added as modifications to your home. These will promote safety and accessibility as you continue aging in place in the home you love.

3. Talk To an Expert To Create a Game Plan

Whether it's a skilled contractor who's worked on other homes of retirees, a mobility company, or even a close friend who has worked with the aging population, it's important to get the information you need to have a plan for prioritizing modifications to your home that will help you age gracefully in it.

If you have been diagnosed with a medical condition that has or may affect your abilities, speaking with a licensed occupational or physical therapist about home modification is a great idea. These health care professionals have an enormous wealth of knowledge regarding disabilities and can make optimal recommendations for maintaining safety and accessibility in your home.

Also, there is a National Home Builders designation called CAPS (certified aging in place specialist). These individuals are trained to evaluate and make recommendations to the public on creating safe environments for people who are aging or struggling with physical challenges.



Plan ahead for older years. Consider working in grab bars, railings or other safety elements. Photo: Deposit Photos

4. Be Proactive—Not Reactive

As the CEO of a home modification company, the biggest mistake I see people making is waiting for a fall to occur before putting in safety measures. So many clients call after they have been hospitalized due to a fall in the bathroom or down the stairs that could have been prevented by retrofitting the home with grab bars, railings, or other safety elements.

Most people experience impaired balance and weakness as they reach their late 70s and 80s. We're happy whenever we get a call from a client who is simply living their life, has not sustained any injuries or falls, and is being proactive by asking for a home evaluation to get recommendations so that they can continue remaining safe. So many injuries could be avoided if more people took these proactive measures.

Studies show that the longer people stay in their homes, the healthier and more productive they are. Our homes become familiar places filled with memories. They are where we entertain friends and family and where many of us want to spend our golden years. Taking an objective look at your home and how it fits your needs as you live out your retirement will help it remain the place you can call home for a long time.

Karen Frank is a licensed physical therapist and the CEO of GreenLight Mobility, a home safety and accessibility franchise. For more information, visit greenlightmobility.com *Link: (http://greenlightmobility.com/)* or backhomesafely.com *Link: (http://backhomesafely.com/)*.

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