

Adapting Home Environments for People with Disabilities

by James Stanwood

People with disabilities need more information about adapting their home environments to make them more livable and safer. The ten ideas below to achieve greater accessibility in the home may require time and legwork to find, put into use and secure the financing; but the effort would be rewarded with many more years of independent living.

1. For better vision, use higher wattage light bulbs where appropriate.
2. To improve hearing, contact the special needs department of your telephone company for amplified phone headsets, signal devices, TTYs and extension bells.
3. For a person with a dexterity problem, install large lever-type controls on faucets, door latches and appliance knobs.
4. Narrow doorways can be widened for wheelchair access by replacing hinges with the "swing-clear" type, by removing doorstops and by removing the doors themselves.
5. Thresholds can be removed or ramped so that they don't create a barrier.
6. Install handrails on both sides of stairways for support going up or down.
7. Use a non-slip surface on ramps that are used wherever floor levels change.
8. To make an existing shower a transfer shower, simply install a seat and appropriate faucet controls, such as the single-lever type and a hand-held showerhead with 5 feet of hose.
9. Grab bars, including the sheltering arm type, can be installed in shower and by toilet, secured to studs or $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch blocking that has been applied to studs.
10. Kitchen base cabinets can be removed or just the cabinet doors to provide wheelchair access to countertops.

You can finance these home improvements yourself, apply for home equity loans (including conversion plans), or rely on grants or loans from a number of public agencies and private organizations. For many more ideas like these, send for "The Do-able, Renewable Home," by John P. S. Salmen, available through the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), at AARP Fulfillment; 601 E Street; Washington, D. C.20049.

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