

Home Modifications for Caregivers: Special Considerations



Most older adults prefer to remain in their homes as long as possible. To do so, it is essential that their home environment supports them to do their daily activities safely. **Home Modification** - making changes to the home environment to support a person's changing needs - can promote health, safety, and independence, and support the work of caregivers.

Why are Home Modifications Important for Caregivers?

People who provide care for others – relatives, friends, or clients – are called **caregivers**. Caregivers assist with daily activities such as bathing and dressing, as well as keeping their care recipients safe in their home. Whether paid or unpaid family members or friends, caregivers can benefit from appropriate home modifications.

Caregivers may experience their own physical and emotional strains from caregiving; for example, transferring the care recipient from a wheelchair or shower. The environment in which they provide care can make their work easier or more difficult; reduce the likelihood of injury, or increase it. Making the home environment safer can help relieve the burden, and help care recipients to live more safely.

Home Modification:

- Reduces accidents by making the home a safer place to live and age in place
- Supports independent living by making daily activities easier
- Reduces physical and emotional strain on caregivers

How Can Home Mods Help? A woman who has rheumatoid arthritis and macular degeneration is cared for in her home by her daughter. To address her vision problems, the daughter increases the bathroom lighting, installs a light switch by the door, and removes a rug that is a tripping hazard. Her daughter helps her obtain a shower chair, elevated toilet seat, and grab bars by the toilet and shower. These changes increase the woman's independence while relieving some of the daughter's stresses with caregiving.

Checklist of Home Modifications for Caregivers

Caregivers can help create a safer, more supportive environment for both their care recipients and themselves. Use a home assessment to check for hazards that could lead to injuries such as falls, and identify areas where supportive features could help.

Low-Cost Home Modifications

This checklist contains inexpensive and easy tips that can help individuals **REMAIN** at home independently: **R**emove, **E**nhance, **M**odify, **A**ccessorize, **I**nstall, and **N**otice.

<p>Remove:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Clutter</u> on floors for clear pathways• <u>Electrical cords</u> from pathways by tacking them to the walls• <u>Tripping hazards</u> such as throw rugs, loose carpeting or uneven areas on floors• <u>Heavier and frequently used items</u> from out of reach locations and place within easy reach• <u>Furniture</u> from walking pathways	<p>Enhance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Safety at night</u> with night lights to mark the path between the bedroom and bathroom and a lamp by the bed• <u>Navigation</u> by marking uneven thresholds with contrasting tape or paint or remove thresholds entirely• <u>Bathing safety</u> with non-skid strips on tub or shower floors, secured bathmats, and shower chairs for sitting while bathing
<p>Modify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Toilet seats</u> to make them higher so that it is easier to sit down and stand up• <u>Light switches</u> to rocker switches and change <u>round door handles</u> to levers for easier use• <u>Shower head</u> to be adjustable height and/or a hand-held shower head to improve reach• <u>Doorways</u> to 32" through offset hinges	<p>Accessorize with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>An emergency alert system</u> if a fall or urgent need takes place• <u>A bell on a small dog or a cat</u> - small pets can be obstacles when not seen or heard• <u>Gripper rug pads</u> under throw rugs• <u>Added seating for dressing and cooking prep</u>• <u>A simple Smart Home Device</u> that provides interaction to reduce loneliness
<p>Install:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Soft corners and edges</u> to sharp furniture• <u>Grab bars</u> for support in and around tubs, showers, and toilets with wall reinforcement and anchored to studs• <u>Anti-scald water devices</u> to keep the temperature below 120 degrees	<p>Notice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>After modifications are made</u>, are they used, and if so, used correctly? Awareness is key to continued use; if not, it is important to determine why• <u>Needs change over time</u> - new circumstances may merit different modifications

How to Get Home Modifications

1. Funding Sources

Depending on income, abilities, and age, people may qualify for financial support to make the changes. For information on home modification funding sources by state, visit www.homemods.org/hmin



2. Finding A Professional

When a professional is needed to check the home and/or make the modifications, a home modification program or specialist can be located through:

- The [Local area agency on aging](#): Call the Eldercare Locator at: 800-677-1116
- An [Independent Living Center](#)
- The [National Directory of Home Modification and Repair Resources](#) lists providers by city

3. More Information

- The **Fall Prevention Center of Excellence** at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology offers information on how to make homes safe and where to find services, programs, and funding support: www.homemods.org
- The [Arch National Respite Network and Resource Center](#) helps families to locate respite (care provided to a child or adult with special needs to relieve family caregivers) through their [National Respite Locator](#).

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