



## **HOME MODIFICATIONS**

### **THE TOP TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

(All items will not apply to all people)

#### **1. GRAB BARS**

Probably the best safety modification we can make. Good for all people especially for those who are older, frail and/or disabled. But they **MUST** be absolutely secure. See section on installing Grab bars.

#### **2. SMOKE-CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS**

Probably (and hopefully) will never be used but if they are ever needed, they save lives. If there is an old non-electric heat source of any kind, be sure to install a working CO detector. The cost of installing them is minimal, the price of **NOT** having one can be devastating. Don't put one in the kitchen as cooking often gives false alarms. Near the kitchen is a good idea.

#### **3. REDUCE TRIP HAZARDS**

A trip and fall to an older person can lead to broken bones that may **NEVER** heal completely and could land the person in a nursing home forever. Two thirds of seniors who have fallen will fall again within six months! Replace slippery throw rugs with ones that have a rubber non-slip back or secure with double sided tape made for that purpose. Perhaps you could get rid of them all together if the homeowner will let you. Look for other trip hazards too like frayed carpets, torn vinyl floor, uneven transitions from room to room, extension cords etc. Maybe re-arrange the furniture but let the homeowners in on the process. If they are visually impaired, **DON'T** move the furniture; in fact make sure you leave everything exactly where you found it. Outside remove low branches that could be walked into.

Almost all homes have some sort of clutter; some are so full of it that it boggles one's mind. Things like stacks of newspapers and old magazines are a trip and fire hazard. Things piled too high or on shelves can fall. Breakables are especially dangerous. Stuff tends to accumulate gradually and almost unnoticeably until it becomes overwhelming. Look especially where it blocks an exit or is piled on stairs and hallways. Encourage the homeowner to let you get rid of some of the junk. Remember some people become hoarders and can't or won't let go. These extreme cases are best left to a family member or social worker.

#### **4. TIGHTEN HAND RAILINGS**

Hand railings often become loose either at the wall or where the brackets attach to the railing. Move the bracket to where it hits a stud if possible. If needed use larger screws or molly bolts. The railings need to be solid and secure and at a height appropriate for the homeowner. Handrails should be installed on both sides of the stairs for added safety and convenience. Outside railings can be constructed out of 1½ inch pipe.

Using elbows and street elbows almost any angle and be achieved. Secure to house or steps with floor flanges. Paint the pipes after construction to protect from rusting. Adjust the height for the weakest user.

## **5. HELP OTHERS “FIND THE HOUSE”**

Make sure the house numbers are BIG, visible and contrast with their back ground. Are there any branches or obstructions that could be cleared away? Brass numbers are pretty on the store shelf, but can't always be read from the street especially when mounted on brick and under certain lighting situations. There are switches on the market that will make the porch light flash. It makes it much easier for first responders to find the house in an emergency.

## **6. SHOWER BENCH AND HAND HELD SHOWER**

Older persons and those with physical disabilities might do better with a shower seat and hand held shower. Most hand held shower units have a 60 inch hose which is designed for someone to stand up and shower; while seated, the hose needs to be longer. Longer hoses are available. It may be easier to purchase the components (shower head, hose and mounting bracket) separately rather than in kit form. There are also hand held shower units with a holder that clamps to a vertical bar. Although that increases the versatility of the unit, my concern is that vertical bar is not nearly as strong as a grab bar and some people may try to use it as such. The units range significantly in price. Moen makes a holder that clips onto a grab bar. This may combine the best of both worlds.

All shower seats are not created equal. Some have backs, some don't, some are longer or shorter. Consider the weight of the user. There are transfer benches which allow a person to sit down outside the shower area (tub) and scoot or swing their legs over. There is a slit in the seat where the shower curtain can be tucked in containing the water to the tub rather than run onto the floor. If somebody needs a transfer seat, they probably need grab bars as well.

## **7. BRIGHTER BULBS**

As we get older, we need more and more light to see. An easy fix is to add higher wattage bulbs to lamps and light fixtures, but be careful not to exceed the wattage recommendation of the manufacturer. Replace burned out light bulbs and add lamps to reading areas and bedrooms if needed. Think about the kitchen too. Installing night lights especially in the hallways and bathroom are a nice touch. Never install CFLs in hallways or near steps.

## **8. LEVER HANDLES AND “SURE GRIPS.”**

It is usually easy for those with a solid grip to turn a knob to open a door, turn on a lamp or get a drink of water. But for those with arthritis or weak hands it can be very difficult and even painful. Try this simple test. If you can do those things with a closed fist, then a person with arthritis should be able to do it too. Fortunately there are several devices on the market to enable a weak hand to operate. There are lever handled faucets to replace the round twist type (especially if they are old and rusty

and hard to twist). The same is true for lever type door knobs. A cheap easy alternative is sure grips. Sure grips (Great Grips) are ribbed rubber caps that fit over door knobs and/or twist faucets to add friction allowing someone with limited mobility in their hands to operate the device. There are even red and blue colored ones to distinguish between hot and cold water. RTA stocks these.

### **9. RAISE THE DRYER**

Build a box out of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood about 10-12 inches high the same size as the dryer (assuming it's front loading) and put it under the dryer. This will raise the dryer door making it easier to get the clothes in and out. This will also work for front loading washers. Make sure it's not too high so that the controls cannot be reached easily. You could add a door for drawer for storage. Paint it the same color as the dryer.

### **10. PULL OUT SHELVES**

Adding or modifying shelves to be pull-out can make it a lot more convenient for storage and retrieval of pots, pans, dishes etc. It is especially true for persons in wheel chairs that can't reach the back of a shelf even if it is low, and impossible to reach the back of the upper shelves even if they have a "grabber". An easy way to do this is adding wire pull out units available from home centers. Or they can be built out of wood with drawer guides. Even just one for the trash can under the sink (if that's where they keep it) can make a big difference.