



Maintaining the Home:

Mobility Impairments, Balance and Coordination

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Mobility Impairments

Standing or walking from one place to another and going up and down steps can be extremely difficult for people with limited mobility. Long, crooked, inclined or uneven pathways are especially hazardous. Some people are not able to walk at all and must perform all daily activities from a wheelchair.

People who use wheelchairs and walkers may not be able to negotiate thresholds or narrow doorways and corridors. People with limited mobility may have difficulty getting in and out of bed, on and off the toilet and in and out of the bathtub or the shower.

Modifications for Mobility Impairments

To help people with limited mobility live independently, barriers outside and inside

the home must be removed. An automatic garage-door opener, a ramp leading to the entrance to the home and curb cuts in sidewalks can help outside. Inside, widen and reframe doorways so that there is at least 36 inches of clearance for a wheelchair or walker. If just an additional inch or two of space will make a doorway wide enough, replace standard hinges with swing-clear hinges. When the swing of a door takes up the maneuvering space that a wheelchair user needs, install a pocket door that slides back into a wall pocket. Replace any high thresholds with low, beveled ones or with smooth flooring. Install ramps wherever the floor level changes in the home.

Lever handles on doors are easier for everyone to manipulate. C or D-shaped handles mounted on the pull side of a door, near the hinged edge, helps users of wheelchairs or walkers close doors behind them.

Make sure there is ample maneuvering space within the home by moving any furniture that obstructs walkways. High-density, low-pile carpeting makes it easier to move wheelchairs and use walkers without tripping.

If possible, there should be a bathroom and bedroom on the ground floor for the person who has mobility problems. This might involve converting a den or a study to a bedroom, and a half bath to an accessible full bath; or, rooms can be added to the house. If these modifications are not possible, a chairlift or an elevator can be installed to transport the person from one level to another. If the individual can still climb the stairs, organize activities and storage areas so that he or she needs to climb the stairs as little as possible.

To eliminate barriers in a bathroom, install a roll-in or walk-in shower with a seat and a handheld showerhead with a flexible hose. To move a person in and out of a bathtub, install a water-operated hydraulic seat; a portable, hydraulic lift; or an overhead track lift. A lift is also useful in the bedroom. In fact, a professional can craft a track for the lift that will move a person from the bedroom to the bathroom and back.

There should be soft, nonskid surfaces on bathtub bottoms, shower floors, stair treads and stair

landings to minimize the danger of falling. Stair treads of a consistent depth, with closed risers of a consistent height, also lessen the hazard of going up and down stairs.

Install grab bars or handrails throughout the home to give support and a place to rest. Grab bars are particularly helpful in bathrooms as aids to getting in and out of the shower or bathtub, and up from or down onto the toilet. Handrails along hallways and on both sides of stairways give security to a person whose mobility is limited.

As with people whose strength and range of motion are limited, it is helpful to bring items to people or to relocate appliances and products. Use pop-up appliance holders, pullout cutting boards and bowl holders, and cutout or recessed spaces beneath countertops, cooktops and sinks to accommodate a seated person or a person in a wheelchair. Store frequently used household items where they can be retrieved with a minimum of bending, reaching, lifting and carrying. There are toilets available with seats 19 inches above the floor, and spacer rings and thick seats can raise the height of existing toilets.

Balance and Coordination

Loss of balance and coordination makes people unstable when standing or walking, putting them at risk of falling, especially on carpeting, stairs and thresholds. People whose sense of balance or coordination is diminished often shuffle to try to keep from falling, but this actually increases the risk. They may have difficulty raising or lowering themselves from chairs, beds and toilets. Dizziness also can cause these problems.

Modifications for Balance and Coordination

To make the home safer, lower or remove thresholds, put skid-proof rug pads under area rugs, secure the corners and edges of area rugs and remove scatter rugs. Place an extended handrail at the head of the stairs to lessen the chance of

an unsteady person falling. Make beds, chairs and toilet seats high enough for easy access. The optimum height differs for each person, but generally it is the height at which the hips and the knees are on the same plane and the feet are approximately under the knees.

People will also need supports to stabilize them as they sit down, rise up and move about. Again, grab bars and handrails are among the most useful items. Placing stable objects near chairs, toilets and beds is especially important. Strategically placed handles on counter tops are also useful. Make sure floors and stairways are well lit.

Home modifications, whether simple or complex, can allow individuals to remain in the home or families to remain together. Modifications and assistive devices make life easier and safer for everyone.

This material was adapted from publications produced by Texas A&M University Cooperative Extension. Extension publications can be found on the Web at <http://texaserc.tamu.edu>.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

Interior Maintenance

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup
Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

Heating

Furnace Care
Fireplace and Chimney Care

Cooling

Evaporative Cooler
Air Conditioner
Ceiling Fans

Plumbing

Fixing Plugged Sink Drains
How to Unclog a Toilet
Repairing Dripping Faucets

Electrical

How to Set or Reset a Circuit Breaker
How to Replace a Fuse

Appliances

How to Buy an Energy Efficient Home Appliance
Choosing a Water Heater

Maintenance:

Dishwasher Care and Dishwasher Cleaning
Dryer Care and Dryer Cleaning
Freezer Care and Freezer Cleaning
Garbage Disposal Care and Cleaning
Range and Oven Care and Range Cleaning
Refrigerator Care and Refrigerator Cleaning
Small Electrical Appliance Care and Cleaning
Washer Care and Cleaning

Flooring

Buying new carpet
Carpet Care and Cleaning
Wood Floors Care and Cleaning
Ceramic Tile Floors Care and Cleaning
Vinyl Floor Coverings Care and Cleaning

Walls

Selecting and Applying Paint
Wallpaper Selection and Cleaning
Repairing Walls

Furniture

Furnishing Your New Home: Color and Design
Selecting Fabric For Home Furnishings

Exterior Maintenance

Home Exterior

Foundations, Basements and Yards
Exterior Walls, Windows, and Doors

Roof

A Guide To Roofs
Roof Maintenance

Landscaping and Lawn Care

Principles of Xeriscape
Watering Your Lawn

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Child-Proofing Your Home
Is Your Home Safe From Fire Hazards?
Smoke Alarms Save Lives
Carbon Monoxide Alarms
Are Your Children Safe From Poisons?
Protecting Yourself Against Burglary

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Easy Tips to Save Money and the Planet
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Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling
Indoor Water Conservation Tips
Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

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Reduce-Reuse-Recycle: Alternatives for Waste Management
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Healthy Indoor Air for New Mexico Homes
Dealing with Mold
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Hazardous Household Substances: Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects
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Cockroaches and Their Control
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Hand Dexterity, Strength and Range of Motion
Cognitive Difficulties
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