

Just as we change our diets and our exercise routine, the home can be gradually adjusted to fit our different needs as we grow older. Instead of remodeling all at once or waiting for an accident to happen, incremental changes can be made through the years that will enable you to stay at home in retirement.

"If you begin to plan now it is always more helpful, especially for budgeting purposes," notes Sue Ramsey, C&I (commercial and institutional)-residential specialist covering Indiana and Illinois for Kirby Risk Electrical Supply. "Take things a room at a time."

Being in a familiar environment provides comfort and refuge.

"It is documented how beneficial it is for one to be at home to recover from an immobilizing injury or to adapt oneself to life's physical challenges as one ages," says LeAnn Osborn, the showroom manager for Creative Bath & Kitchen, a division of Leming Supply, Inc. in Lafayette. Osborn is a certified aging in-place specialist (CAPS). She earned this qualification through the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). The training has enabled her to identify specifics that need to be modified in order for people to stay in their home safely as they get older.

The first item that people ask for when remodeling is to convert a tub to a shower, says Bob Newlin, president of Bob Newlin Homes, Inc. in Lafayette. The idea is to create an environment that has as few barriers or obstructions to moving around as possible. The design is also constructed to prevent slipping in the shower. As one ages, it is often more difficult to sit down and get up in the bath or shower.

"Actually, it's really simple in that we take the tub out easily, and depending on the side walls, either keep those or take them out," he explains. "We would put in a fiberglass shower or a ceramic shower; there's solid surface material and a number of choices to reconstruct showers."

If the resident loves taking a bath, Osborn recommends the homeowner install a "walk-in" bathtub.

"Upgrades to this tub include whirlpool jets or air portals that give the user a softer effervescent water action," she says.



Time for a change?

Remodeling keeps you safely and comfortably at home

You can also make changes in the bathroom that are less expensive, but that may turn out to save you a lot of money in the long-run by preventing an accident.

Remove a glass tub/shower enclosure and replace it with a shower curtain, Osborn suggests. While a shower curtain might not look as nice, the opening of the shower door is usually not wide enough to allow someone to go in and out of the shower safely. Shower seats also can be added to help a homeowner in a wheelchair move into the tub. In addition, anything that poses a slipping hazard should be removed.

"Non-skid surfaces are recommended in bathrooms," Osborn says.

Grab bars, which were often associated with an institutional look, are now much more aesthetically

pleasing and can enhance the overall appearance of the bathroom, says Newlin. The grab bars are available in different finishes to match what is already in the bathroom.

"So the shapes look better now; they're easier to hold on to for people who have arthritis or other conditions that affect mobility."

Residents in the home who have difficulty with mobility would find it beneficial to install a toilet that is taller than the standard, approximately 17 inches from the floor, says Osborn. She also recommends a bidet seat for the toilet, which is a spray and drying device so that the homeowner can continue to have privacy.

As for a sink, she suggests



installing lever-style handles, which are easier to operate than a faucet with a rounded handle.

In addition to remodeling a bathroom, adjusting lighting in the home becomes increasingly important as people get older, Ramsey says. Spending the money required for better lighting also may save you costly medical expenses in the future.

As an example, Ramsey points to under cabinet lighting, particularly in areas where work is done. Popular styles are xenon, fluorescent, halogen and LED.

“Under cabinet lighting is one of the first places I would recommend,” she says. “It doesn’t need to go under every cabinet. Most kitchens have a dark corner. That is the best place to start.” Above cabinet lighting can also be added for more light.

Ramsey points to night lighting on the exterior of the home that can improve safety and improve aesthetics. “The lighting is thrown out more towards the bottom rather than emitting out a full glow,” she explains.

Talking to friends and family who have had a successful remodeling project is the most efficient way to find a qualified contractor, Osborn says. You also can find local contractors through trade organizations like the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) and the NAHB.

Finally, even if you relocate before you have the chance to grow older in your current home, this type of remodeling is a good investment.

“Future buyers will most likely appreciate wider doorways, easy to use faucets, slip-resistant flooring surfaces, well appointed switches and well lit rooms,” Osborn says. ❧

Remodeling resources:

LeAnn Osborn, showroom manager of Creative Bath & Kitchen and Certified Aging In-Place Specialist, welcomes readers to contact her to discuss areas to improve safety and accessibility in the home. Creative Bath & Kitchen, a division of Leming Supply, Inc., is located at 851 South Farabee Court Lafayette, IN 47905. (765) 448-7986 • losborn@lemingsupply.com • www.lemingsupply.com

More information can be found at:

- The National Association of Home Builders • www.nahb.org
- The National Association of the Remodeling Industry • www.nari.org

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