

Universal Home Design General Recommendations

2017

Based on professional experience and information from several web sites.

Access begins with arriving at the site, exiting the vehicle and entering the building.

- Parking area relatively level for access from vehicle to entry. Wheelchair lift van requires a level area next to the vehicle passenger side 8' wide.
- Level or gentle slope (1/20 to 1/12) from sidewalk, parking spot, and mailbox to entry door.
- Level or gentle slope (1/20-1/50) of approach to the entry door, with 36"-60" deep level area both inside and outside entry door swing area.

Providing aging-in-place capacity includes an accessible bathroom.

- Main floor bedroom and bathroom designed to be wheelchair accessible or able to modify without moving plumbing fixtures ("minor" remodel = replace cabinets).
- 36" wide doors, 32" minimum clear width finished doorway openings.
- 42" wide hallways.
- Firm floor materials, with transitions less than 1/2" to avoid tripping. Rugs non-slip.
- Lever handles on doors and faucets. Locate shower and tub faucets for easy access.
- Blocking in walls for future grab bars around all tubs, showers, and toilets. Blocking for future handrail installation in hallways. 32"-36" above finished floor.
- Walk-in shower with low or removable threshold, grab bars, hand-held shower spray, and room for a stable shower seat. A shower chair is adjustable thus more useful than most built-in shower seats.
- Multiple levels (options) of lighting allow increasing lighting levels particularly in bathrooms and kitchens. Low-glare fixtures and surfaces suggested.
- Closets with adjustable or multiple height rods and shelving.
- Handrails firmly attached on both sides of stairways inside and outside the home. Extend handrails 12" past top and lowest risers. Increase light levels at stairways for safety. Stair floor finish and nosing should be slip resistant.
- Slip-resistant flooring in potential wet areas like exterior doors, bathrooms and kitchens.
- Multiple counter heights in kitchen work areas: 34" maximum accessible from seated position, 36" is standard, 38" for people taller than 6', and consider a 30" sit down area like a bar counter or nearby table. Provide pull-out shelves in lower cabinets.
- Appliances with easy-to-grasp controls, stove with front-mounted controls, side by side refrigerator/freezer for various access needs, front-loading washer and dryer set on raised platforms to reduce bending, simple large print controls.
- Place outlets 18"-48" above finished floor, and light switches and thermostats within 48" of the floor for a good reaching range. Rocker light switches are easier to use.

Recommendations vary with disability, and many modifications can be made without expensive remodeling. For recommendations for specific or complex disability home modifications, request a home visit from a rehabilitation engineer, occupational therapist or a physiatrist.