



Maintaining Seniors' Independence Through Home Adaptations

A SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE

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CMHC would like to thank March of Dimes
for their contribution on this publication

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre :
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guide d'évaluation pour les aînés (61276)*

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Introduction

The overwhelming majority of seniors wish to continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible. However, many homes are not well designed to meet our changing needs as we age.

This Guide identifies the types of difficulties that seniors can experience and describes types of adaptations that can help overcome these difficulties.

Using the Guide

Each of the sections of this Guide deals with an activity in the home. In using each section of the Guide, first decide whether you are having difficulty with the described activity. If you are, examine the types of adaptations described in the section and decide whether any could help you. If you can think of a useful adaptation that is not described in the Guide, you can write a brief description in the appropriate section, so that you have a complete record of the adaptations you are considering.

Although this Guide is designed to assist you in assessing your own needs, you may wish to ask a family member or friend to help you answer the questions. Sometimes, a second pair of eyes will spot something you have overlooked.

Getting the work done

You, a family member or a friend may possess the knowledge and special skills required to successfully carry out some of the adaptations you have identified.

However, if you are going to get a contractor to carry out the work, it is advisable to obtain more than one estimate. This Guide, complete with your notes and descriptions, can be used as the basis for obtaining tenders and negotiating with the contractors. See CMHC's **Hiring a Contractor** at www.cmhc.ca.

You may have to be selective in choosing adaptations in order to stay within your budget, so be sure to concentrate on the adaptations that will be of most benefit to you. Every house and every person's requirements are different, so be sure you agree only to adaptations that you need and want.

You may wish to visit the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) website, at www.cmhc.ca, to find additional information.

If your home is rented, you should check with your landlord and obtain written confirmation verifying that the proposed adaptations may be made.

SECTION 1: Getting in and out of the home

1.1 Do you have any difficulty walking from the garage, the backyard or the street to your door?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Repair holes or uneven joints in walking surfaces that could cause tripping.

Widen the walkway.

Add steps to remove a steep slope.

Add a ramp or sloped walkway to bypass existing steps. See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Ramps at www.cmhc.ca.

Install or repair handrails along the walkway, ramp and steps.

Provide non-slip finish on walking surfaces.

Add a vertical wheelchair lift or other type of stair climbing device that can be used outdoors.

Ensure that all surfaces are solid, firm and clear of ice.

Consider using contrasting colours, textures or landscaping to better define the pathway.

Other (describe).

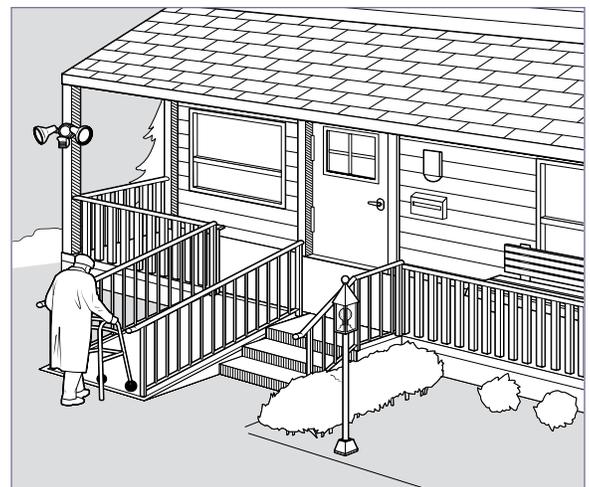


Figure 1: A ramp or a sloped walkway next to existing steps allows someone who uses a walker or a wheelchair to bypass steps. Handrails further guide and provide support for people with low vision or reduced balance or mobility.

1.2 Do you have any difficulty due to poor lighting along the walkway leading to your home?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install light fixtures or floodlights to illuminate entrances, steps and walkways without shadows.

Install easily accessible light switches in more than one location or lights on motion detectors for automatic lighting.

Use solar lights along walkways.

Use large, easy-to-see house numbers.

Other (describe).

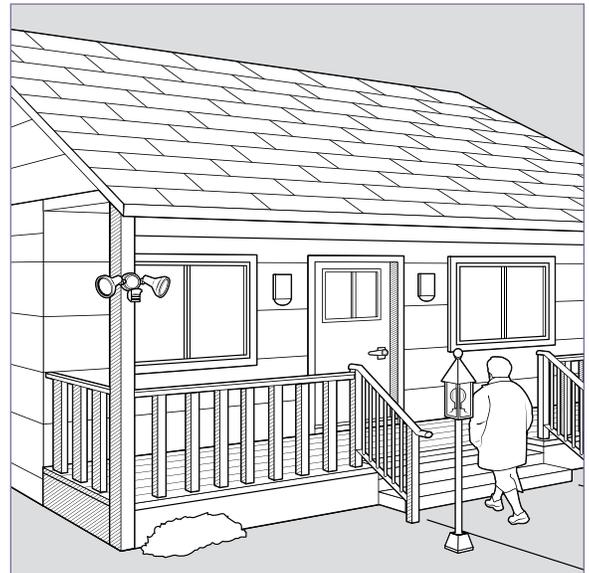


Figure 2: Well-lit walkways, steps and entrances, as well as colour contrasts, help people with low vision to detect obstacles. Ensure lighting does not cast shadows on steps.

1.3 Do you have trouble using outside doors?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Remove the screen door.

Reduce height of door threshold and adjust or replace door as necessary.

Add a handle or grab bar near the step or threshold.

Install a small ramp where there is a change in floor level at the door opening. See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Ramps at www.cmhc.ca.

Install an automatic door opener.

Replace locks with ones that are easier to use.

Install lever-type door handles or install doorknob adaptors that simulate lever-type door handles (see figure 8 on page 6).

Install small shelves inside and outside entrances at elbow height to hold parcels while opening doors.

Use colour contrast on door, door frame, handle or doorbell.

Lower the mailbox or install a mail slot into the door with a basket inside.

Add a bench beside the door.

Install a peephole for security.

Other (describe).

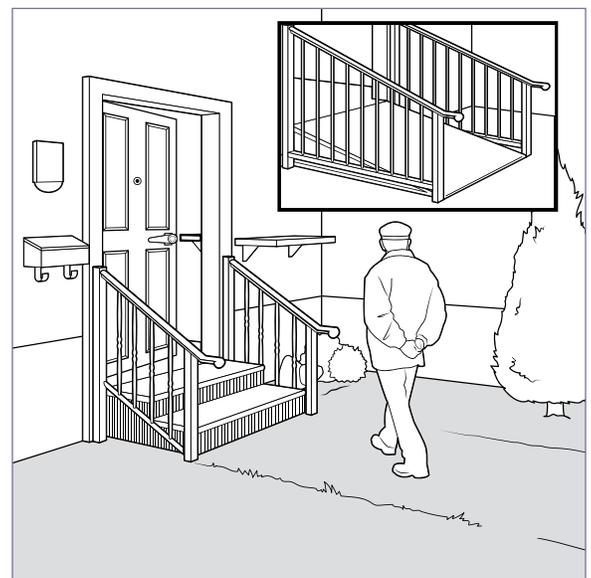


Figure 3: Low thresholds, small ramps or extra steps with a handrails or grab bar can be used at changes in floor levels in door openings.

SECTION 2: Using the stairs

2.1 Do you have any difficulty using the stairs inside your home?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Improve lighting in stairs and hallways leading to staircases.

Install two-way light switches at the top and bottom of stairs. This can be done using toggle light switches that light up in the dark, making them easy to find.

Install or repair handrails. Rounded handrails are easier to use and grasp.

Install a chair lift. See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Lifts and Residential Elevators at www.cmhc.ca.

Maintain a consistent handrail height above each step and above the floor.

At the top of the stairs, extend the handrail horizontally, the length of one tread, beginning directly above the last stair. At this point, extend the handrail horizontally at least 305 mm (12 in.).

At the bottom of the stairs, extend the handrail horizontally, the length of one tread, beyond the first step. At this point, extend the handrail horizontally at least 305 mm (12 in.).

Remove worn stair coverings.

If you have limited vision, mark stair nosings permanently (not with tape), if they are not distinctly visible. Note that a painted stripe can work well and also look good.

If possible, relocate the bedroom and laundry room to the main floor level, and relocate or add a toilet on the main floor or bedroom level.

Other (describe).

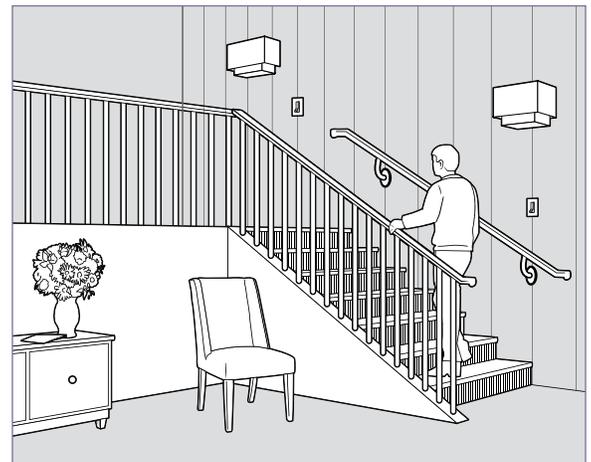


Figure 4: A well-lit staircase with solid handrails on both sides, extending beyond the top and bottom of the stairs, together with visually prominent steps, is safer and easier for people with poor balance or low vision.



Figure 5: A well-lit staircase with a chair lift can help people with mobility issues.

SECTION 3: Moving around your home

3.1 Do you have any difficulty moving from one room to another?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Reduce the height of, or eliminate, door thresholds at room entrances.

Use colour contrast or changes in floor texture wherever there is a change in floor level.

Install swing-clear hinges on doors to widen doorways.

Install handrails or grab bars where there are significant changes in floor levels.

Install handrails along corridor walls.

Place seating along long corridors.

Reduce clutter.

Arrange furniture to create direct paths between areas and rooms.

Put lights on timers.

Remove mats wherever possible to eliminate the risk of tripping.

Other (describe).



Figure 6: Strong colour contrast strips or changes in floor texture can help people with low vision detect possible obstacles when moving between rooms.



Figure 7: Handrails along corridors help people with poor balance or mobility. Seating in a corridor gives people a place to rest.

3.2 Do you have any difficulty with doors?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Repair the door frame or door hinges.

Reverse the direction of the door swing.

Consider removing doors that are not often used.

Replace doorknobs with lever-type door handles (see figure 8) or install doorknob adapters that simulate lever-type door handles.

Install sliding or accordion doors for closets and the pantry.

Install D-type handles or loop handles on sliding or accordion doors (see figure 9).

Other (describe).

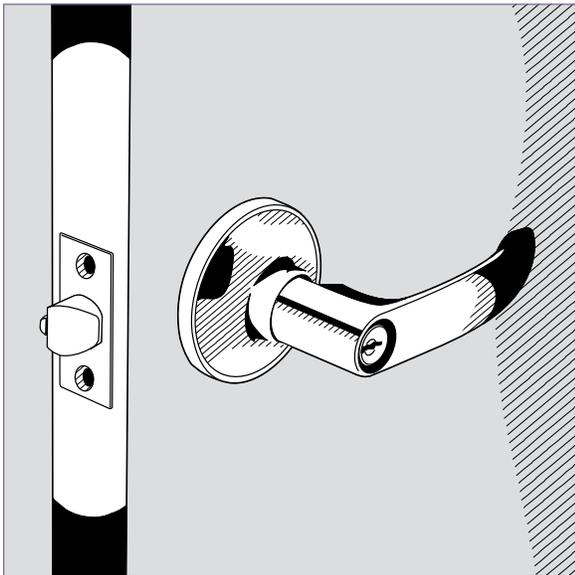


Figure 8: A lever handle is easier to operate for a person with a poor grip. A single-action deadbolt lock is secure and requires the use of only one hand.



Figure 9: A large D-shaped handle can be pulled by people with decreased movement and strength in their hands.

SECTION 4: Using the kitchen

4.1 Do you have any difficulty working at the sink or using the faucets?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Adjust the sink to a convenient height. If you like to work at the sink in a chair, a convenient height would be 864 mm (34 in.).

Create knee space under the sink to enable you to work from a chair (insulate any hot water pipes). See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Kitchens at www.cmhc.ca.

Install lever-type faucets or a faucet with a single lever to control the flow and temperature. Touch faucets are also easier to use.

Other (describe).

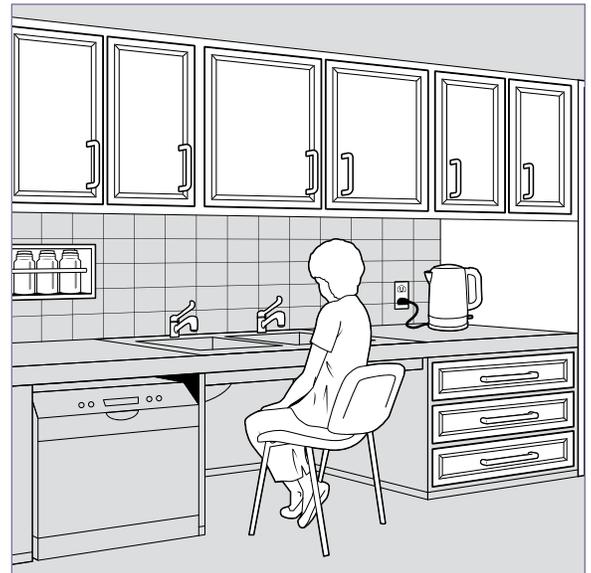


Figure 10: If you usually stand while using the sink, the sink should be at a height requiring minimal bending. If you wish to sit while using the sink, there should be knee space and the sink and faucets should be positioned to require minimal stretching.

4.2 Do you have any difficulty working at the counter?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Create counters with various heights so that you may work either seated or standing.

Install additional counter or storage space.

Install pullout shelves under the counter to enable you to work from a seated position.

Remove a cupboard, including base cabinetry—exposing flooring, to create knee space under the counter for working in a seated position.

Install task lighting under upper cabinets to brighten countertop working areas.

Other (describe).

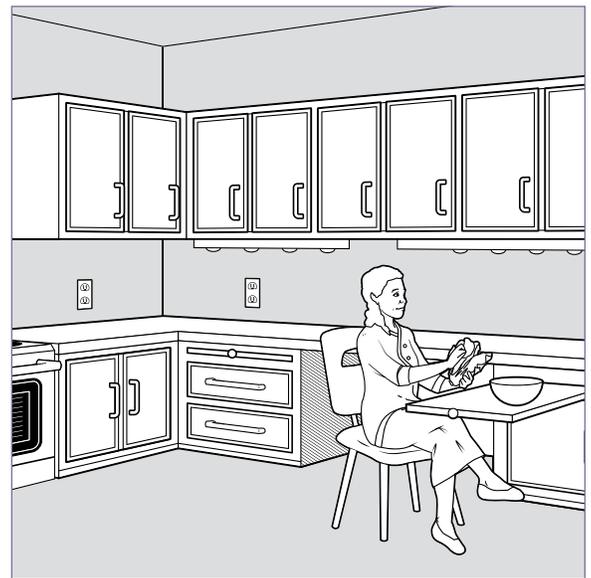


Figure 11: Pullout shelves enable you to carry out food preparation in a seated position. U-shaped or L-shaped counters minimize walking distances between tasks.

4.3 Do you have any difficulty reaching or using cupboards or storage space?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Lower existing cupboards.

Lower the shelves in cupboards.

Place the most used items on lower shelves in cupboards.

Install pivoting or revolving shelves in corner cupboards.

Add cupboards or shelves at convenient heights.

Add a vertical cupboard or pantry.

Add pullout storage units under the counter and/or in the pantry.

Install D-type handles on cupboards and drawers.

Safely organize and store sharp knives in a wooden block.

Other (describe).

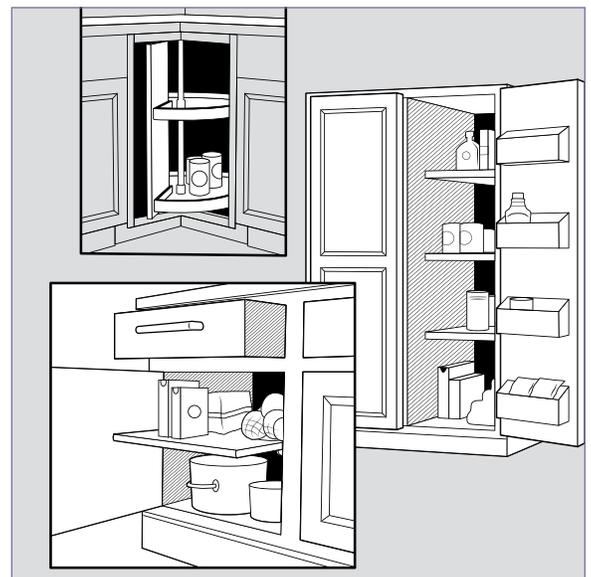


Figure 12: Pivoting or revolving shelves in corners, pullout storage units and large vertical cabinets make storage more accessible.

4.4 Do you have any difficulty using appliances?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.

Install additional shelves or countertop to accommodate small appliances.

Provide electrical outlets or power bars for small appliances in more convenient locations.

Provide a heatproof, pullout shelf beside the oven, ensuring it is strong enough to hold heavy pots and pans.

Install a heatproof surface on the counter next to the range or stove.

Consider installing a faucet above the stove or cooktop to fill pots.

Install smoke and heat detectors outside, but close to the kitchen.

Install a fire extinguisher near the kitchen exit.

Other (describe).



Figure 13: Install electrical outlets so that small kitchen appliances can be used in convenient locations without being moved.

SECTION 5: Using the bathroom

5.1 Do you have any difficulty using the wash basin or the faucets?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Adjust the wash basin to a convenient height.

Create knee space under the basin to enable you to use it from a seated position (insulate any hot water pipes). See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Bathrooms at www.cmhc.ca.

Strengthen the basin with legs or a solid cabinet that allows for proper knee space.

Install a faucet with a single lever to control the flow and temperature.

Relocate the faucet to the front or side for easier access.

Other (describe).



Figure 14: If you tend to lean, pull or push against the basin, it may need to be supported on legs or a solid cabinet. A cabinet can be designed to allow you to use the basin from a seated position.

5.2 Do you have any difficulty using or storing personal care items near the wash basin?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.

Install additional counter space around the basin.

Install shelves beside the basin for storage.

Install a grab bar within easy reach.

Install or reposition a mirror (tilting, if necessary) at a convenient height (see figure 15).

Install additional light fixtures near the mirror or medicine cabinet.

Install an adjustable shaving mirror with a light and a magnifying side.

Other (describe).



Figure 15: The mirror should be positioned at a convenient height, and tilted if necessary, so that it can be used from a standing or a sitting position. Grab bars by the sink can provide additional stability.

5.3 Do you have any difficulty stepping into or out of the bathtub?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.

Install vertical and horizontal grab bars in locations that will best assist you in entering and exiting the tub. Ensure the grab bars are well secured.

Install non-slip flooring throughout the bathroom.

Ensure floor mats have non-slip backing.

Install a non-slip surface in the bathtub.

Install a commercial or custom-made transfer bath bench, so that the tub can be entered from a seated position.

Replace the bathtub with a shower stall or wheel-in shower, if stepping over the tub wall is too difficult or unsafe.

Install a separate shower stall or wheel-in shower, if the difficulty is severe.

Modify the tub with a custom cut-out to eliminate the need to lift legs over the side of the tub.

Install a ceiling track or other lift system for use by caregivers to transfer individuals with serious disabilities into the tub with the appropriate bath seat.

Other (describe).

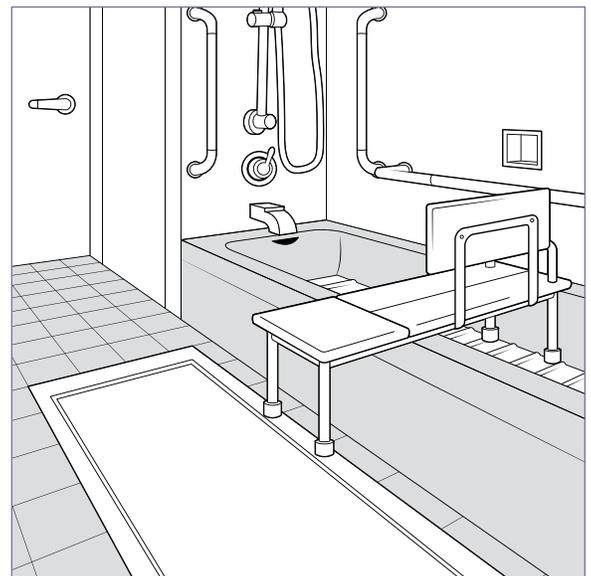


Figure 16: A vertical grab bar provides support when entering the tub, while a horizontal (or angled) bar helps you to complete the entrance and lower yourself onto a shower seat or to the bottom of the tub. Grab bars should be installed to suit the needs of each particular user.

5.4 Do you have any difficulty using tub faucets, shower controls or drain plugs?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install lever-type faucets or a faucet with a single lever to control the flow.

Adjust the hot water heater or install a device that will prevent the water from reaching too high a temperature.

Install a drain plug device that can be operated from a convenient height.

Other (describe).

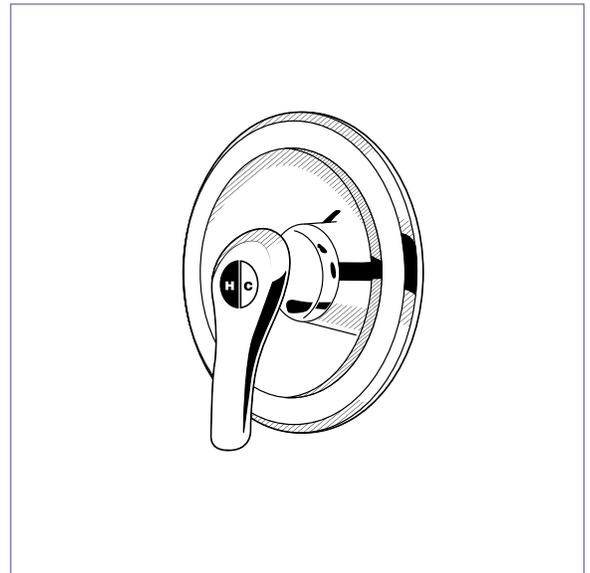


Figure 17: A mixing control with a single lever handle, for shower and bath, can be used by people who have difficulty grasping things.

5.5 Do you have any difficulty taking a bath or a shower?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.

Install a hand-held shower on an adjustable rod or high-low mounting brackets.

Install a flip-up seat in the tub or shower, and make sure the seat has legs that come down for support. The seat should be secured with proper mounting brackets in wall studs or plywood wall backing.

Install shelves within reach, for personal care items.

Install grab bars in more than one location within reach (see figure 16 on page 13).

Install a waterproof light fixture over the tub or in the shower stall.

Install shampoo and conditioner dispensers.

Other (describe).

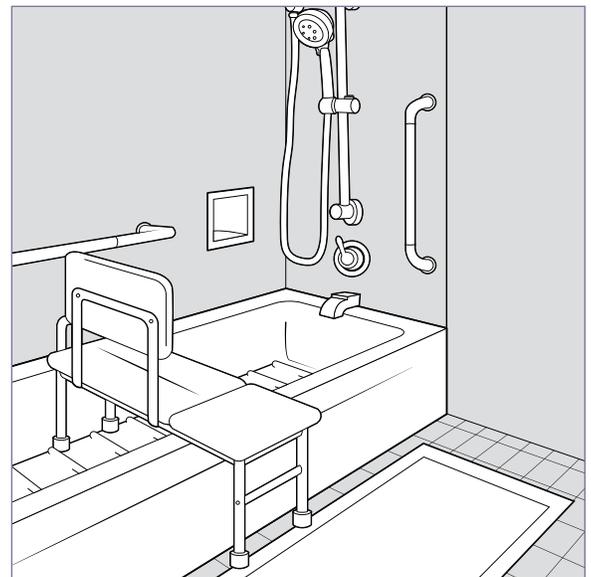


Figure 18: A hand-held shower, mounted on a vertical rod or on a low bracket, makes washing and rinsing easier when you use a seat.

5.6 Do you have any difficulty using the toilet?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.
>>

Raise the toilet seat to a convenient height by using a portable extension or setting the toilet on a pedestal.

Install fold-down grab bars.

Install fixed grab bars on the walls surrounding the toilet.

Adapt the flush handle or install an activating sensor.

Adapt or relocate the toilet paper dispenser.

Provide a commode on levels of the home where it is not possible to install a bathroom.

Other (describe).

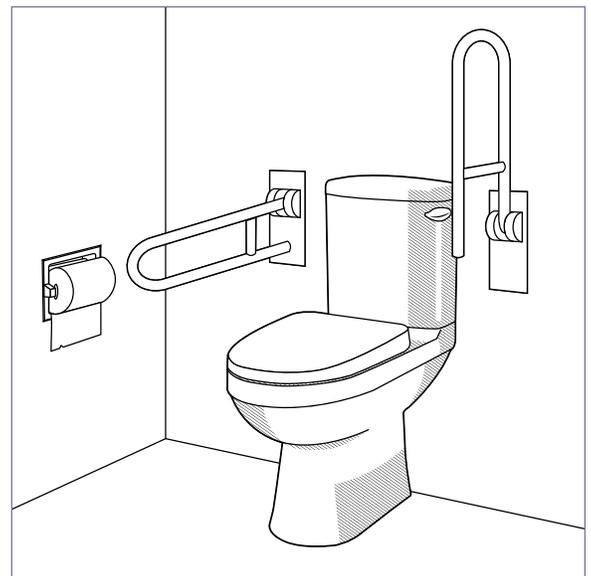


Figure 19: Grab bars can be attached to structural supports in a wall or directly to the toilet.

SECTION 6: Getting out of a bed or chair

6.1 Do you have any difficulty getting into and out of a bed, chair or sofa?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install a trapeze over the bed. Portable trapeze on floor mounts are also available. See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Residential Hoists and Ceiling Lifts at www.cmhc.ca.

Install grab bars in convenient locations.

Install a floor-to-ceiling pole to assist you in getting into and out of bed or use a lift chair.

Raise chairs and sofa with furniture risers.

Ensure the cushions are firm to avoid “sinking” into the furniture.

Install bed rails to prevent falls out of beds.

Other (describe).

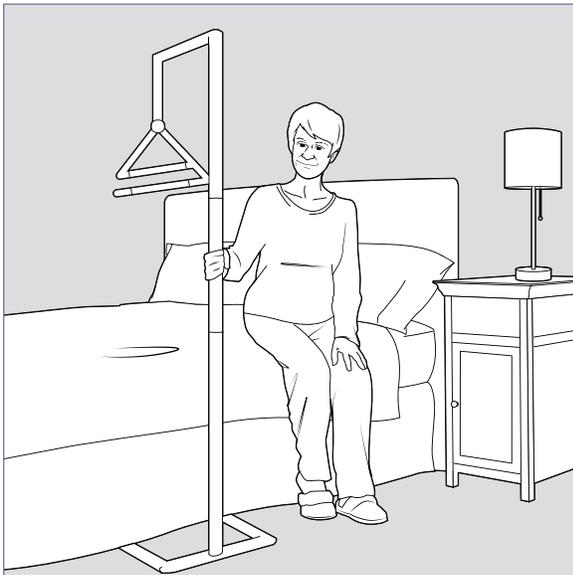


Figure 20: Trouble getting out of bed.

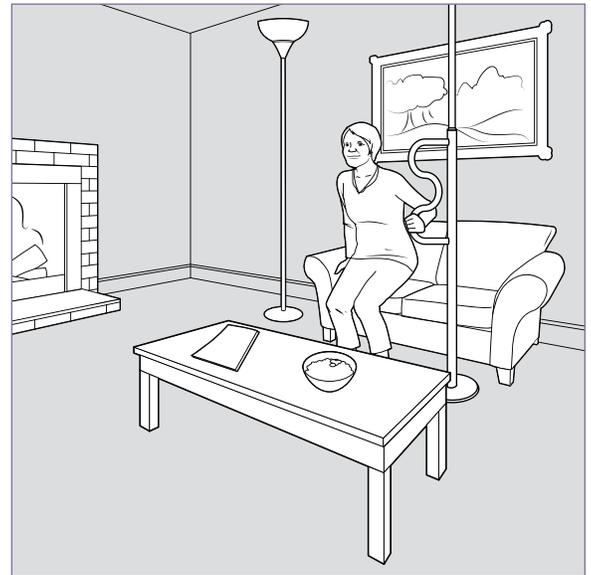


Figure 21: Trouble getting up from a sofa.

SECTION 7: Using closets and storage areas

7.1 Do you have any difficulty reaching clothes, coats, shoes or other items in closets?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install sliding or accordion doors.

Install swing-clear hinges in order to widen the closet opening.

Install lights in closets.

Add or lower rods.

Add or lower shelves.

Add off-floor shelves in closets or at entrances for shoes and boots.

Install hooks or drawers in closets.

Build an easy-to-access storage closet for household tools and appliances (vacuum cleaner, ironing board, brushes, etc.).

Other (describe).

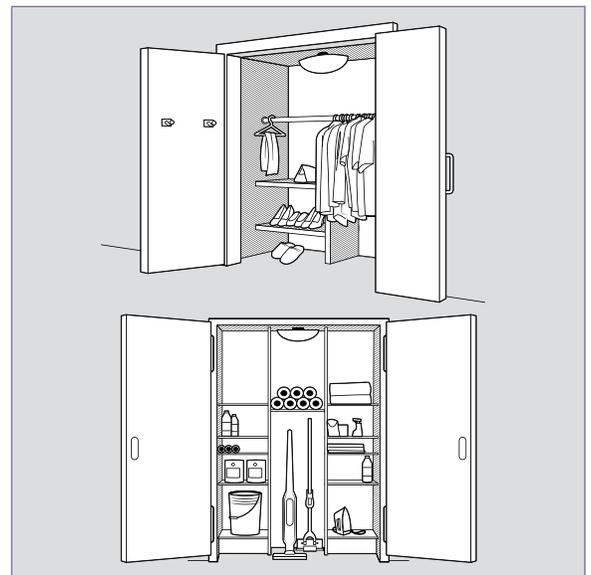


Figure 22: Reachable shelves and rods in clothes closets and a well-designed utility closet for household tools and appliances help people who cannot reach very high or who have difficulty bending.

SECTION 8: Doing laundry

8.1 Do you have any difficulty doing the laundry?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Relocate appliances to a more convenient place or floor level (main floor).

Install machines with clear, easy-to-read controls and loud cycle alarms. Stackable machines are much smaller and easier to reach.

Replace top-loading appliances with front-loading ones, and use the pedestals that are sold with these appliances to raise them off the floor.

Provide shelves or storage near appliances for washing supplies.

Use a clearly marked detergent.

Build a counter or large shelf near appliances for sorting and folding clothes.

Adjust the clothesline to a convenient height.

Install a conveniently located clothesline or rack.

Purchase a wheeled laundry basket.

Other (describe).

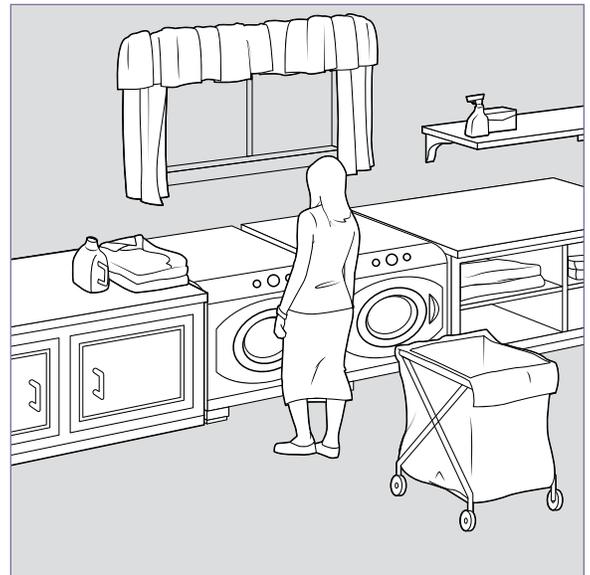


Figure 23: A countertop near the washer and dryer cuts down the number of times you have to move your laundry. A dryer could be useful for people who have difficulty using a clothesline.

SECTION 9: Using the telephone and answering the door

9.1 Do you have any difficulty getting to the telephone on time?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.

Install phone jacks in convenient locations (near bed, sofa) and at a convenient height.

Purchase a portable phone with multiple handsets that can be placed in several locations in the home.

Set your phone so that there are several rings before the call goes to voicemail.

Install voice-controlled devices to control air conditioning, heating systems, telephones, appliances and other devices from a central programmable command centre. See CMHC's Accessible Housing by Design – Home Automation at www.cmhc.ca.

Other (describe).



Figure 24: Installing phone jacks in several locations or using a portable phone can be helpful to people who cannot move quickly.

9.2 Do you have any difficulty identifying visitors or hearing the doorbell?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install a peephole or view panel at a convenient height.

Install an easy-to-use intercom in a convenient location.

Install a flashing light or other sensory cue to indicate when the doorbell rings (see figure 25).

Install a motion detection light to adequately illuminate the area outside the door.

Other (describe).

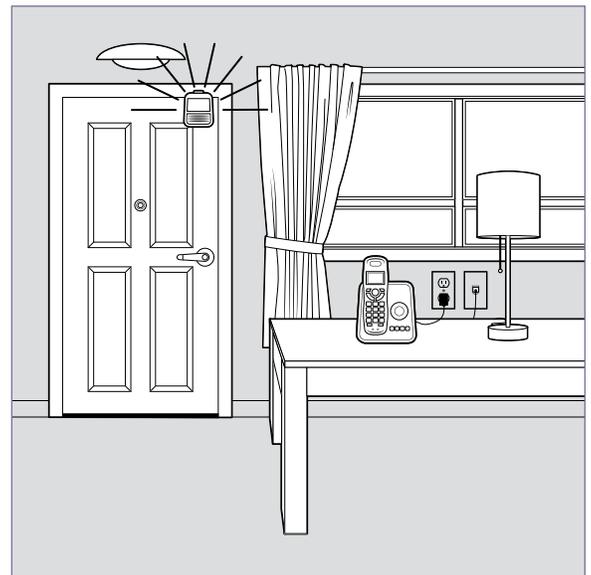


Figure 25: Devices such as a flashing light or sound amplifier to supplement the doorbell may help people with poor hearing or low vision.

9.3 Do you have any difficulty reaching and emptying the mailbox?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install the mailbox at a convenient height.

Install a mail slot with a box or basket on the inside.

If your mail is delivered to a community mailbox, contact Canada Post and request a box that is within reach.

Install a shelf near the mailbox to hold parcels.

Other (describe).

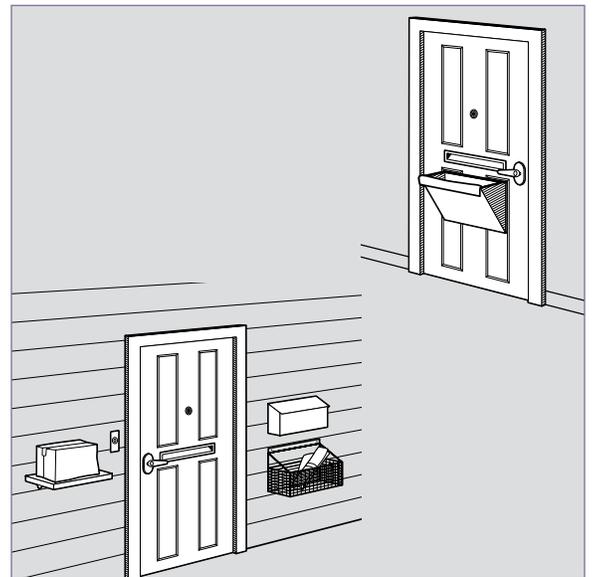


Figure 26: A box or basket under a mail slot and a hanging bag on the outside for newspapers will reduce the need to bend down.

SECTION 10: Controlling light and ventilation

10.1 Do you have any difficulty due to poor lighting in areas of the home not mentioned previously?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install light fixtures or electrical outlets for lamps where needed, for example, in hallways, in working areas, in the pantry and near reading or activity areas (sofa, bed).

Use colour-contrast or glow-in-the-dark light switches that can be easily seen in different light conditions.

Install light switches at convenient locations, for example, at room entrances, near bed and sofa, at both ends of corridors and at the top and bottom of staircases.

Use toggle-type light switches that also light up in the dark so that they are easy to find.

Install motion sensor-type lighting so that lights turn on automatically when entering a room.

Install an electronic thermostat that will heat and cool the home automatically based on your preferences.

Use cords with in-line toggle switches to make lights easier to turn on and off.

Put some lights on timers to prevent dark areas.

Other (describe).

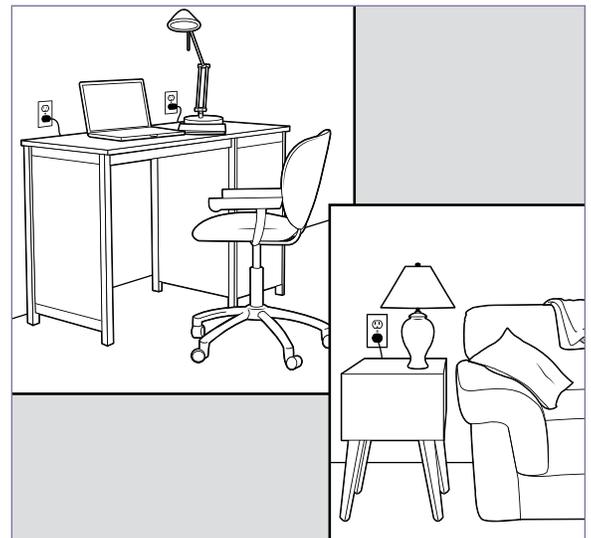


Figure 27: Additional electrical outlets can be conveniently located near reading and activity areas so that table lamps and appliances can be used without the need for long extension cords. The outlets should be positioned at a height that minimizes the need for bending.

10.2 Do you have any difficulty with windows or sliding patio doors?

NO If no, go to the next question. >>>

YES If yes, check off the adaptations below that would help you.



Install easy-to-grasp handles.

Install secure and easy-to-operate locks.

Repair windows and sliding doors so that they open and close easily.

If possible, replace existing doors with French doors.

Install security grilles on windows that are vulnerable to forced entry.

Install locking bars on windows or sliding doors that are vulnerable to forced entry.

Install small ramps to make entering and exiting easier and safer.

Use window coverings that will allow light in but not cast complicated patterns or shadows.

Other (describe).

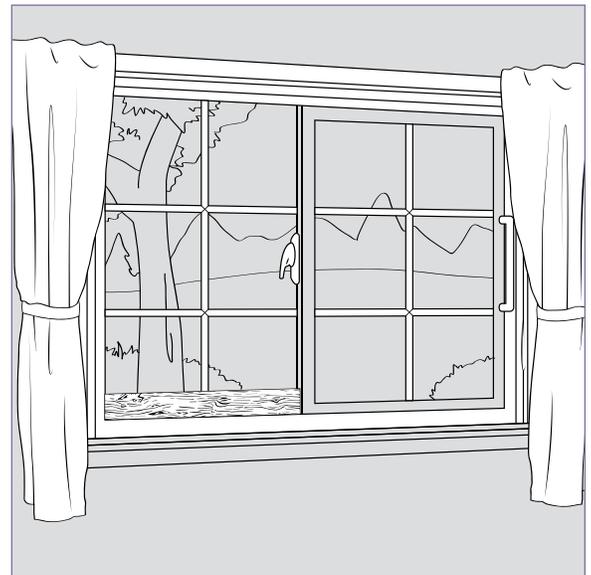


Figure 28: Large D-type handles and extension arms on locks are easier to grip for people with decreased strength and movement in their hands. A locking bar placed between the frame and edge of a sliding door is effective in preventing forced entry.

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