



Adaptations for the Bathroom

Bathrooms are the most common sites for accidents in the home. Many devices are now available to make bathroom use easier and safer for persons with disabilities.

A disability can sometimes prevent a person from freely entering, moving about, and exiting their homes. Good planning and the proper application of technology can maximize independence and quality of life for all persons.

- The widths of the door openings are crucial. There should generally be at least 32 inches of space to properly enter and exit. Special swing-away hinges can be cheaply installed to increase the free space by as much as 3 inches.
- The area just inside and outside of the doorway should also be considered. There should be enough room to pivot once inside. This movement requires up to 60 inches of free space in each direction. Move all unnecessary furniture to make room.

Grab Bars

Why are grab bars important? Falls, particularly for older or medically fragile persons, can cause serious injuries. The transfer of a person's body weight on a wet, slippery floor surface (often on one foot!) is very precarious. Fatigue from hot water and poor visibility from steam may make the situation even more dangerous. Towel racks are often grabbed as persons are falling and may break loose, causing serious injuries.

- Grab bars are the single most important adaptation one can make to a bathroom. Yet, only 6% of older persons have grab bars in their homes! Grab bars provide additional safety for all persons who use the shower, not only persons with disabilities.

Cost? \$20 to \$100 per bar, depending on style and modifications needed. They must be able to hold 250 lbs. At least two of the three screws must go directly into the stud. (Mounting through the tile and sheet rock only is not adequate.)



Grab bars can be mounted on the tub itself. These are good, cheap and easy to mount, but they can pose a fall risk when exiting the tub. It is very important to carefully plan your entry and exit points.

How far from the wall should the bars be mounted? 1 ½ inches from the wall is preferred to prevent the arm from getting caught in a gap. The space should be wide enough to properly grip the bar, but not wide enough to slide the wrist through.

Toilets

Grab bars that surround the toilet on both sides are best. Wall mounted bars are safer than the freestanding ones. Have a “practice” session to set up the bars for the proper height. It can be difficult to use bars that are too high or too low. Raised toilet seats allow persons who transfer to the toilet from a standing position to do so with less effort. This device is crucial for persons who have had recent hip surgery to avoid excessive forward bending.



Raised Toilet Seat

Showers/Bathtubs

Some people may stand during showering and need a chair for resting only. Chairs for persons who transfer to a standing position should be higher to make rising easier.

How will the transfer to the bathing area take place? If a person is transferring from a wheelchair, the bath chair should be of the same height (or adjustable). Swivel bath seats are often desirable for persons who transfer from wheelchairs.



Tub Transfer Chair

Are the water temperature controls accessible when the chair is being used? If not, can the chair be moved closer, or can a long hand-held hose be installed? With a hand-held shower nozzle, the user can control the direction of water flow at all times and avoid the necessity of moving around while rinsing. Most models have a showerhead mounted on a long hose for manual use, and some have foot controls, as well.

Many types of mechanical lifts are available to allow persons with severe mobility limitations to safely transfer to the shower or bath. These include lifts that transport a person using a sling that moves along a built-in track mounted on the ceiling, or self-contained lifts that have wheels and move around inside the bathroom space, or a water or battery-powered lift that stays in the bathtub itself. The ceiling mounted lifts require less room, but are often expensive and require permanent alteration of the room. The self-contained lifts work well, but require more open space around the tub/shower to move around. It is important to access enough space around the tub/shower area to make a proper transfer if the user uses a wheelchair. For the battery or water powered lifts that stay in the tub, the individual is required to transfer to the tub lift. Some models come with a swivel seat option.

Non-skid mats and safety strips can further reduce the risks of falls during bathing. These attach to the bottom of the tub and create friction to provide a more stable standing surface. These, like grab bars, are an essential safety product that will benefit all users.

Other Common Adaptations

Persons with reduced hand function from arthritis or other illness may benefit from tap turners. This device is a large lever extension that bolts on to an existing faucet knob. Taps then become much easier to operate. Also available are rubber grips that attach to the knob, allowing the user a more secure grip.



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Some individuals with reduced sensitivity of the skin may need additional feedback regarding the temperature of the bath water. Units can be attached to the shower (or sink) spigot to monitor the temperature of the water and prevent scalding.

Some persons have difficulty holding a hair dryer during use due to limitations in hand function. Hand-free dryer holders mounted on a wall or on a freestanding base can help.

If the home has a person using a wheelchair, the bathroom sink should be high enough to allow the chair to slide underneath during grooming. With most wheelchairs 27"-34" is sufficient. There must be at least 6 1/2" of depth, and 30" of width available as well. An adjustable mirror is often useful because it allows all users to customize the angle when grooming.

The light switches must be low enough to allow all persons to use them, but must not be accessible from the tub/ shower area.

The space should have adequate lighting to enhance safety for all users.

Pill reminders will automatically alert the user to the pills required for any given day. These devices come in low and high tech models. Low-tech units have pockets with medicines pre-arranged for each day. High tech models talk to the user and include reminders on timing and food intake, etc.

RESOURCES

AAA Medical
9197 West 6th Ave, Suite 1000
Lakewood, CO 80215
303/781-1474
800/525-8586
www.aaamedical.com

Accent Information
P.O. Box 700
Bloomington, IL 61702
309/378-2961

Access Foundation
P.O. Box 356

Malverne, NY 11565
516/887-5798

Accessible Systems, Inc.
5596 S. Sycamore
Littleton, CO 80120
303/693-7787
www.accessiblesystems.com

AdaptAbility
P.O. Box 515
Colchester, CT 06415-0515
800/243-9232
www.adaptability.com

Adaptive Environment Center, Inc.



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www.adaptenv.com

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Englewood, Colorado 80113
303/794-3928
800/726-0851
www.adcohearing.com

American Association of Retired
Persons
601 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20049
www.aarp.org

American Society on Aging
833 Market Street, Suite 511
San Francisco, CA 94103-1824
415/974-9600
www.asaging.org

Amputees in Motion
P.O. Box 2703
Escondido, CA 92033
619/454-9300
www.faimonline.org

The Arc of the United States
1010 Wayne Ave., Suite 650
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-565-3842
www.thearc.org

Arthritis Foundation

P.O. Box 7669
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669
404/872-7100
www.arthritis.org

Assisted Access, Inc.
P.O. Box 230
Lake Villa, IL 60046-0230
800/950-9655
www.nfss.com

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303/837-8964 TTY
303/837-1208 FAX
www.uchsc.edu/atp

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Western Slope Technical Assistance
Center (WesTAC)
2897 North Ave., Module 3A
Grand Junction, CO 81501
970/248-0876 Main
970/248-0877 FAX/TTY
www.uchsc.edu/atp

Association of Home Appliance
Manufacturers
20 North Wacker Dr.
Chicago, IL 60606
202-872-5955
www.aham.org

Barrier Free Environments
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800/582-8732
www.bfl-inc.com

Beyond Sight
5650 S. Windemere
Littleton, CO 80120
303/795-6455
www.beyondsight.com

Brain Injury Association of America,
8201 Greensboro Dr., Suite 611,
McLean, VA 22102
703/761-0750
www.biausa.org

Capabilities, Inc.
6805 W 88th Ave
Westminster, CO 80021
720/214-0339
www.capabilitiesinc.net

Center for Accessible Housing
NCSU School of Design
P.O. Box 8613
Raleigh, NC 27695
919/515-3082
www.design.ncsu.edu/cud

Dr. Leonard's Healthcare
100 Nixon Lane
P.O. Box 7821
Edison, NJ 08818

800/785-0880
www.drleonards.com

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877/648-8465
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800/377-7878
www.harrietcarter.com

Home Automation Association
808 17th St. NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006
202/333-8579
www.homeautomation.org

Independent Living Aids, Inc.
27 E. Mall
Plainview, NY 11803
800/537-2118
www.independentliving.com

Information Center for Individuals
with Disabilities
Ft. Point Place, 27-43 Wormwood St.
Boston, MA 02210
617/727-5540
www.disability.net

Jensen Medical
1900 S. Quince St.
Denver, CO 80231
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www.lssgroup.com

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P.O. Box 3209
Farmingdale, NY 11735
800/522-6294
www.maxiaids.com

Medical Home Supply
111 W. Evans Ave., #1
Denver, CO 80223
303/762-1263
800/873-8385

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41 W. 8th Avenue
Oshkosh, WI 54906
702/617-3500
www.mileskimball.com

Mountain View Medical Supply
5370 Sheridan Blvd.
Arvada, CO 80002
303/455-1300
www.mvms.com

National Assoc. of Home Builders
NAHB Nat'l Research Center
400 Prince Georges Blvd.
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772
301/249-4000
www.nahb.org

National Kitchen & Bath Association
687 Willow Grove St.
Hackettstown, NJ 07840
800/843-6522
www.nkba.com

North Coast Medical, Inc.
18305 Sutter Blvd.
Morgan Hill, CA 95037-2845
www.ncmedical.com

PAM Assistance Center
601 W. Maple
Lansing, MI 48906
800/274-7426

Paralyzed Veterans of America
Information Specialist
801 18th St. NW
Washington, DC 20006
202/416-7710
www.pvaorg.com

Pathways HomeCare Center
11091 E. Mississippi Ave.
Aurora, CO 80010
303/365-2100
www.pathwayshomecare.org

Pathways HomeCare Center
1500 West Littleton Blvd., Unit #127
Littleton, CO 80120
303-798-5588
www.pathwayshomecare.org

Post-Polio Health International (PHI)
4207 Lindell Boulevard, #110



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Boulder, CO 80303

303/442-2116

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Bolingbrook, IL 60040-5071

800/323-5547

www.sammonspreston.com

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Colorado Springs, CO 80915

800/525-9291

www.wdrake.com

StayACTIVE Shoppes

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Thornton, CO 80229

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www.stayactiveshoppes.com

Whirlpool Corp. Appliance

Information Service #4300

Benton Harbor, MI 49022

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