

Aging in Place

How to Plan for Senior Living



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Aging in Place: *How to Plan for Senior Living*

When it comes to planning for later in life, Americans have some work to do.

Only a small number of America's 78 million baby boomers are making the changes that will allow them to live at home as they get older.

And that's a missed opportunity, because there's **good news** for senior citizens who hope to remain at home. There are professionals and new products designed to help deal with the financial, social and physical implications of aging in place.

By coming up with a plan to age in place, senior citizens can make the most of all the resources available to them. By being proactive, rather than waiting for a financial or health crisis, you are likely to make better decisions. You're also less likely to get a better value for each dollar spent on good and services designed to allow you to age in place.

This guide can help ensure that you – or your loved ones – remain safe and comfortable, while still living independently at home. It covers planning steps and ideas for:

- Home modifications and maintaining freedom through the practice of what’s known as “universal design.”
- New products – assistive technology, in-home activity monitoring - that can provide safety for seniors at home while giving their caregivers some peace of mind.
- Resources and services available to help you or your loved ones remain at home.

You’ve worked hard to make your house a home. It’s our hope that this guide can help you stay there long after your working days are done.



Products and Technology That Ensure Safety – What’s Changed?

We’ve come a long way from Mrs. Fletcher.

In the late 1980s, she was a character in a commercial for a product called Life Alert, which allowed senior citizens to call for help during a medical emergency.

Since that time, “smart technology” such as GPS, blue-tooth, smart-phone apps and voice activation have made it easier and easier to help older people age in place. Let’s look at some of the technology that’s available.



1. Medical alert systems

While the need for emergency alert systems hasn’t changed since the days of Life Alert, the technology behind them has. Modern medical alarms allow you to call for help at home and on the go, with emergency locating capabilities in areas that have cellular coverage. And because falls are such a concern for people over 65, many of these alert systems are designed with a fall detection sensor, which can automatically signal that help is needed if a fall occurs.

These devices can be used at home or on the go, with mobile systems that can work anywhere. There is typically a monthly fee for these services, as well as an initial purchase cost. Your doctor, pharmacist or medical supply store should be helpful in finding a medical alert system manufacturer that’s right for you.



2. Automated medication dispensers

Are you worried that you've forgotten to take your medication? Or that you're taking more than you need to take? Nearly 60 percent of US seniors do not take their medications as prescribed, and that 40 percent of seniors take at least 5 different medications regularly. An automatic medication dispenser can help eliminate this concern.

These dispensers can automatically dispense medication to a patient as much as four times a day. If a patient misses a dose, the dispenser can notify a data center, which then contacts the patient – either by phone, e-mail or text – to issue a reminder.

Some products even issue reminders to do other chores, such as feeding pets or taking a walk -- beneficial for people with memory impairments. Lastly, there's a cost benefit: Medication management services can save families \$3,000/year over using human care providers.

3. Stair lifts

It's no exaggeration to say that installing a stair lift – or chair lift – can be life-changing. Parts of your home that might have otherwise been off-limits due to mobility issues are suddenly accessible again. Instead of having to turn a downstairs room into a bedroom, or remodel a bathroom, you can continue to access both floors of your home without needing to worry about getting up and down steps.

But lift technology doesn't just end with the stairs. There are lifts that help wheelchair users get in and out of homes when ramps aren't an option, and other lifts that can get you into the pool or the bathtub.



4. Lift chairs

Not to be confused with a chair lift, these devices are comfortable electric recliners that give a mechanical boost to assist users go from a seated to standing position. The lift systems are typically quiet and smooth, and help avoid injury and increase safety. Caregivers can feel confident that the person using the chair will be able to stand up without a struggle.

Lift chairs have come a long way, in terms of function and attractiveness, with many styles, colors, fabrics and finishes to choose from. The upholstery usually includes stain, odor, and germ resistance. Some chairs even include heat and massage options.



5. Oxygen concentrators

Home oxygen concentrators will work without the use of an oxygen tank refill. These devices filter the ambient air in your home and turn it into purified oxygen. Instead of having to worry about carrying around a heavy oxygen tank, these devices are often small and portable. And unlike an oxygen tank, a concentrator doesn't need to be refilled.



What is Universal Design and How Can It Help with Independence?

If you've ever used Velcro, or listened to an audio book, or stepped through an automatic door, you've entered the world of universal design.

Sometimes referred to as "design for all," universal design is the concept of creating products, buildings and environments that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

And as we get older, that concept becomes more and more important, especially when mobility may become an issue.

While electric scooter or wheelchair use may immediately come to mind, universal design also encompasses many other ways to make living at home easier and safer.

Making some modifications can mean the difference between moving to an assisted living facility and enjoying your golden years at home. And this doesn't always mean major renovation projects. Here are some universal design elements to consider to make your home more accessible.



Reducing falls

The risk of falls increase dramatically with age. Falls are the number one cause of injury for older Americans, affecting a quarter of seniors every year. But you can reduce this risk by making a few adjustments to the home:

- Install floors made from non-slip surfaces such as linoleum or textured stone, and remove trip hazards such as loose rugs and carpeting or uneven floorboards.
- One of the easiest ways to avoid a fall is to keep things neat. Get rid of clutter, especially near stairs and hallways.
- Put down non-slip mats in showers and bathtubs.
- Make sure your home is well lit. Invest in some brighter light bulbs, particularly in your hallways and on stairways. Consider adding night-lights to your bedroom and bathroom. You may want to install remote controls for blinds, lights and window coverings.



In the kitchen

You've always loved to cook, and there's no reason you should have to give that up as you get older. But you may need to make a few changes to your kitchen:

- Install counters that are at multiple heights, allowing people to prepare meals whether they are sitting or standing.
- Leave a clear five-foot-wide area in the kitchen so there's enough space for a wheelchair to make turns.
- Modern appliances offer wheelchair users more options for access, whether that means stoves that have their controls on the front or refrigerators with side-by-side refrigerator/freezer designs.



In the bathroom

Nowhere is it more important to maintain your independence than in the most private space in your home. Universal design allows you to continue to make use of your bathroom with these changes:

- Install comfort-height toilets. These are typically 17 to 19 inches off the ground, which put less stress on your knees and back when sitting and standing.
- Put grab bars in the shower to make it easier to get in and out, and next to the toilet.
- If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, you will likely need to replace your tub with a roll-in shower. At the very least, your showers should have curb-less entry/zero threshold to minimize tripping and allow for wheelchair accessibility.

Getting in and out

When considering universal design fixes for the home, don't neglect your entryways, doorways and hallways:

- Modular ramps and/or railings may be necessary for entering and exiting the home.
- Make sure doors are at least 34 inches wide, with no thresholds. (These can be trip hazard.)
- You can make doorways wider by removing frames, reversing the direction in which they open or simply removing the doors.
- Switching to sliding doors, or installing automatic doors also add to your home's accessibility.
- Swap out doorknobs for lever handles on your doors. Do the same thing for cabinets in your kitchen and bathroom.
- Allow for at least 12 to 18 inches of clearance next to the handle side of doors, which will make them easier to open.

While these steps can certainly help make your home more accessible, sometimes aging in place means embracing new technology. In the next section, we'll look at some devices that can keep you safe and provide some peace of mind for your caregivers.





Services and Resources for Aging in Place

If all of this seems daunting, don't worry. There are services and resources out there devoted to helping senior citizens stay in their homes.

Start by visiting The National Aging in Place Council (www.ageinplace.org), which serves as a clearinghouse for similar local councils, while also advancing the aging in place concept among businesses, public agencies and the health care system.

The [AARP's website](#) offers a home fit guide designed to help people age in place. It offers a room-by-room tour, tips for spending less during a renovation and advice for hiring a contractor.

Many states have an equivalent of Pennsylvania's [Area Agency on Aging](#), which are set up to connect senior citizens and their families with services for seniors in the community.

And lastly, don't forget your medical supply company. In addition to advising you on products, some medical supply firms are adept at dealing with Medicare and Medicaid. They can act as a go-between for clients and these government insurance programs, and can determine which products and services are covered by which agency.

For many of us, our homes help define who we are. They are the place where memories are made, and a reflection of what we've worked for. We hope that the steps we've offered in this guide have helped show you there are ways for you to enjoy your home for as long as possible.



About Marx Medical Equipment

Contact Marx Medical Equipment for help with making your home more accessible, safe, and comfortable. We understand the process of making a home one for aging in place can be an overwhelming task. We can help you determine what's best for your individual situation. Customer service is our No. 1 priority.

We provide rental, sales and repairs for your convenience. We also offer white-glove delivery service, and our professionally trained technicians take pride in explaining new devices and equipment to our customers.

We also specialize in home modifications and home accessibility solutions. We work with Medicaid Waiver programs, and are knowledgeable about approval processes. We provide services including assessments, estimates, blueprints, equipment brochures, and physical therapy evaluations.

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