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ADAPTING YOUR HOME

Here are some changes you might want to make to your home or your aging parents' home to make it easier for them to get around. Consider how disabled your parent is and whether they are wheelchair-bound or not. All costs are approximate.

Outside the house:

- Add ramp to replace steps. Maximum slope should be 1 inch for every 20 inches of length; bolted in place for stability. Cost: \$300.
- Add rails on both sides of steps. Average installation cost: \$38 per linear foot.
- Add non-slip, contrasting color strips on exterior stairs to aid a person with reduced vision identify steps. Cost: \$3 per roll.
- Add lighting along walkways and pathways. Consider motion detectors. Cost varies, but outdoor lights cost \$15 to \$40 each.

Inside the house:

- Replace door knobs with "flip" handles that are easier to use. Cost: \$30 each.
- Replace swinging doors with pocket doors to take up less space in hallways. Cost: \$750 per door.
- Visual-signaling smoke detectors have a light that flashes when smoke is detected to alert a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Cost: \$80.
- Enlarge door openings. Cost: \$450.
- Fasten rugs and mats to floors to reduce tripping with double-sided tape. Cost: less than \$3 per roll.
- Add handles on both sides of stairwells. Cost: \$500.
- Widen doorways for wheelchair access. Cost: \$1,500 per a door.
- Install a chair lift on stairway. Cost: \$4,500 to \$19,000.
- Install an elevator with an external shaft. Cost: \$26,000 and up.
- Use French doors that open easily instead of sliding glass doors. Cost: \$3,000 per door.

In the bathroom:

- Install a roll-in shower or low-rise step-in tub. Cost: \$3,000.
- Add handles and grab-bars in tub and toilets. Get 1/4 to 1 1/2-inch diameter grab-bars for adults. Cost: \$20-35 at hardware stores; \$50/ hour for labor for installation.
- Add hand-held shower heads. Cost: \$50 to \$125.
- Install "roll-up" cabinets for wheelchair-bound elderly. Cost: \$500-\$1,000 per cabinet

- Make sure faucets have anti-scald temperature controls. Cost of new faucet: \$250 to \$500.
- Add a bathroom. Cost: \$10,000 to \$12,000.

In the kitchen:

- Install "roll-up" cabinets for wheelchair-bound elderly. Cost: \$500 to \$1,000 per cabinet.
- Install pull-out shelves for low or deep shelves. Cost: \$30 to \$40 per cabinet.
- Lower light switches. Cost: \$500 per fixture.
- Get a side-by-side refrigerators for easier access. Cost: \$1,000 to \$2,000.
- Install a wall-mounted oven for easier access. Cost: \$400.

General tips:

- Be sure furniture is stable, not wobbly, and has no sharp corners.
- Remove scatter rugs and clutter.
- Keep pathways through rooms open.
- Place barriers at dangerous hallways, like the top of stairs.

Source: National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification, Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, Pacific Nonprofit Training Center, Adrian Foley, President of Brookfield Homes Southland Group