



# Real Estate Matters

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www.seniorsrealestate.com

## Aging in Place

**Trends in Senior Housing so you can stay in your own home longer - with safety, independence, comfort, and the ability to function.**

**Aging in Place** deals with how to modify and adapt existing homes. **Universal Design** primarily deals with the creation upfront of easily accessible homes and products rather than after the fact modification. **Think of it as pre-planning.**

### What is Aging in Place?

- Remaining in your current home as you grow older - "Not having to move from one's present residence in order to secure necessary support services in response to changing needs." Journal of Housing for the Elderly.
- A new variation is aging in your current community, where your friends, activities, and organizations are located but in a different house or condo, not your home of thirty years where you raised your children.

The National Association of Home Builders defines aging in place as:

- \* remaining in one's home safely, independently, and comfortably
- \* the pleasure of living in a familiar environment throughout one's maturing years
- \* the ability to enjoy the familiar daily rituals and special events that enrich our lives
- \* the reassurance of being able to call a house a home for a lifetime.

### Do you live in a NORC?

Over one-fourth of seniors live in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, where residents have aged together. Maybe you moved there for the quality high school, raised your kids together, buried each other's parents, created a tightly knit community, and stayed.

When reviewing your goals, ask yourself, "Do I want to live in a community exclusively comprised of peers? Do I want a blended community of children, families, middle-agers, and seniors?"

Where you are located at age 65 is probably where you will stay. Seventy percent (70%) of seniors live out their lives wherever they were at 65. Many plan for retirement and relocate at 65 or earlier and then stay there. The early baby boomers (born at the end of WW II) are moving in their late 50's to early 60's to their vacation homes and then staying put. Some are relocating and then commuting from the planned retirement home during those last few years in the work world.

An AARP study revealed that 89% of homeowners prefer to remain in their homes, yet 80% of the population will require special housing needs at some point in time.

**Modifications can make it possible for you to stay in your own home for many more years.**

### Specific Remodeling

Breaking a hip is a common and valid fear. Without aggressive physical therapy, the consequences are serious. The obvious changes are handrails and lights in the hallways, grab bars in the shower and tub. But it goes beyond that for safety, comfort, and ability to function.

You and your SRES® may wish to consult a professional early on when evaluating what you need now and may need in the near future to stay in your home. A home builder or remodeler who is a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist should be a part of your team.

Focus on modifications that cater to any potential limitations. The list below is not a massive to-do list but areas to consider that may uncover previously unrecognized needs.

## **General**

- Adapt lower floor of home for possible one level living
- Increase general incandescent and specific task lighting
- Easy garage or parking access
- At least one entry without steps
- Doorways 36" wide with off-set hinges on doors
- Levered door handles instead of knobs - so Grandpa Arthur-itis doesn't have to grasp and turn handles
- Electrical outlets at 18 inches instead of 12
- Easy to open or lock patio doors and screens
- Light switches at 42" instead of 48
- Adjustable controls on light switches
- Lighted, glow in the dark switches in bedrooms, baths and hallways
- Strobe light or vibrator-assisted smoke and burglar alarms
- For easy opening to enjoy that springtime breeze-lower window sills especially for windows on the street
- Programmable thermostats for heating and cooling
- Contrast colors between floor and walls
- Color borders around floor and counter-top edges
- Non-skid flooring
- Matte finish paint, flooring and counter-tops (eliminates glare)
- Non-glare glass on art work
- Lower the peep hole
- Incorporate an emergency response system

## **Bathroom**

- Install anti-scald valves for lever faucets and faucet mixers
- Temperature controlled shower and tub fixtures
- Shower stall with a low threshold and shower seat
- Grab bars at back and sides of shower, tub and toilet or wall reinforcement for later installation
- Bathrooms with turn around and transfer space for walker or wheelchair (36" by 36")
- Bathroom counters at workable height
- Telephone jack
- Installation of medical response device

## **Kitchen**

- Equip kitchen cabinets with pull-out shelves and lazy susans
  - Easy to grasp cabinet knobs or pulls
  - Task lighting under counters
  - Cooktop with front controls is more accessible and keeps your Great Aunt Sophie's blue nylon nightgown sleeves from catching on fire.
  - Side by side refrigerator. This reduces bending. Adjustable upper shelves and pull out lower shelves
  - Variety in kitchen counter height - some as low as table height (30 inches)
  - Gas sensor near gas cooking, water heater and gas furnace
  - Color or pattern borders at counter edges
- ## **Living Room**
- Seating at least 18 inches off the floor (reserve the bean bag chairs for the grandchildren)
  - Chairs with sturdy arms and shallow seats -- for ease of getting up

To locate the Certified Aging in Place Specialists in your state and their areas of expertise, go to [ww.nahb.org/directory](http://ww.nahb.org/directory) and enter aging in place specialists in the search box, upper right corner.

If you are strapped for cash to remodel and want to age in place, in addition to exploring reverse mortgages, check your State Controller's Office to find out if your state allows low-income seniors to postpone your property tax. Some states allow this with a delay of payment until you sell your property or your estate is settled.

If you want to age in place in a smaller or less expensive home, check out your county's downsizing tax breaks. If you are over 55, sell your home and move to a home of equal or lesser value in the same area, some areas/counties calculate your property tax using the base year value of your old home.

## **Universal Design**

Universal Design definition: the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

You need to be aware of this growing trend of building homes that incorporate Universal Design and look for those design features

when buying a home. Many of the remodeling items listed above were included in the blueprints for these newer homes.

The summer polio scourges of the 1930's, 1940's and early 1950's (before Salk's vaccine) impacted thousands. Those who survived lived with a range of disabilities. Many of those physical limitations were accommodated by the benefits that arose from the universal design movement, such as lowered water fountains and level subway platforms.

The Center for Universal Design lists the seven principals that guide the design of more usable products and environments:

1. **Equitable Use** means a useful design for people with diverse abilities. Privacy, safety and security equally available for all. Same means of use or equivalent.
2. **Flexibility** accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. Adaptable to user's pace. Serves both left and right handed users and aids user precision. An example would be left handed scissors.
3. **Simple and Intuitive:** How to use is easy to understand- independent of experience, language, knowledge or ability to focus.
4. **Perceptible Information** design tells you what you need, independent of the surrounding conditions or user's senses, such as hearing. Provides the information several ways - such as verbally, visually, and for the blind- by touch. Make legible for all -- no tiny print!
5. **Tolerance for Error** minimizes hazards (such as the barbeque requiring two actions to make the propane work) and consequences of accidents or mistakes. And provides a means to fix those screw ups- such as the computer UNDO button.
6. **Low Physical Effort** reduces repetition and sustained effort, plus incorporates reasonable and prudent operating forces. Also normal body position - Should not require a circus contortionist to operate.
7. **Size/Space for Approach & Use** Regardless of body size, posture, or mobility. A user can approach, reach, or manipulate in the appropriate space. A basketball player can enter a room without smacking his head, the bathroom doors are wide enough for

wheelchairs, and if you are not a basketball player, you can still reach the kitchen cabinets.

### **Why is all this important to you?**

Because when you are buying a home, one with Universal Design components can allow you to stay in that home independently and safely for much longer. And those key benefits help when selling a Universal Design home.

An example of Universal Design concept is the ergonomic (science of people and things interacting safely and effectively) Good Grips kitchen tools.

They are comfortable, affordable tools for everyone who cooks. And great food prep tools for those of us who do more food assembling than "cooking." (My great grandmother's generation thought that if you couldn't bake, you couldn't cook.) Initially these products arose in the late 80's out of Sam Farber's frustration and his arthritic wife's difficulties with most kitchen gadgets.

After much research with industrial designers and gerontologists, Sam had a hit. The company was profitable in the first year and sales grew 50% each year thereafter in its first decade. The peeler doesn't bend in half under pressure, doesn't hurt your hand, doesn't rust within six months, and actually works-and works well.

For three holidays running, I included the peeler with all my gifts, then switched to the pizza cutter. Families and even my cooking-challenged bachelor friends need a pizza cutter.

And the parent company's name OXO is the same spelled backwards, forwards, and upside down- a universal design name! Universal Design helps you physically cope, without discomfort.

**So Aging in Place remodeling or buying a Universal Design home are key options to help keep you in your own home.**

### **Online resources for seniors living at home:**

For resources that can help seniors stay in their own homes, go to [www.aging-parents-and-elder-care.com](http://www.aging-parents-and-elder-care.com), then scroll down the center and click on Independent Living. This site provides a variety of links with resources that can help seniors remain in their homes,

including Lifeline Medical Alert Systems at [www.lifelinesys.com](http://www.lifelinesys.com) and the Senior Corp elder companion program.

Go to [www.seniorcorps.org](http://www.seniorcorps.org) and click on About Us on the left side. Then scroll down to find Senior Companions and click.

To access Making Your Home Safe for Seniors: A Room-by-Room Assessment, go to <http://oursenioryears.com/homesafety.html>

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