

1970

EC70-2215 Independent Living...Your "Age-Proof" Home

Mary Dale McGregor

Magdalene Pfister

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>

McGregor, Mary Dale and Pfister, Magdalene, "EC70-2215 Independent Living...Your "Age-Proof" Home" (1970). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 4042.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/4042>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

CYT
Vert. File
S
85
E7
No. 2215

E. C. 70-2215

Independent Living...



Your "Age-Proof" Home



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS,
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING. E. F. FROLIK, DEAN; J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

INDEPENDENT LIVING!

Your "Age-Proof" Home

By Mary Dale McGregor
Extension Specialist (Housing)
Magdalene Pfister
Extension Specialist (Home Furnishing)

Everyone wants beauty, comfort, safety and a degree of independence and privacy in his or her home. Different people have different goals and values but the basic housing needs are the same. These needs often become more important as we get older.

For the young adult an unsafe step could mean a bruise while for the older person it could mean a broken hip.

As you get older your eyesight might get "just a little dim," you aren't quite as agile as you once were or you may have lost just a little of that "get-up-and-go."

Steps may become more of a problem; conveniences in the kitchen and comfort in furniture may become more important. So adjust your house to meet these increased needs.

Housing can contribute to, or shorten, the time an older person can live independently in his own home. Good housing can mean staying in comfortable surroundings with familiar possessions. This independence is something most people enjoy. For them, staying at home is very important—it also can be very dangerous. In Nebraska, falls account for 190 deaths each year. Many of these persons are older citizens.

What can you do to make your home a place where you can continue to live safely and independently?

What can you do to help the older persons in your family maintain their independence in safety and comfort?

Here are some suggestions:

Windows and Doors

The placement and selection of windows and doors can add to the enjoyment of the home or present hazards and inconveniences.

Windows and doors should be easily and safely operated. Double-hung windows can be difficult to operate and should be avoided. Doors should close slowly. Swinging doors should be avoided or replaced.

Entrance and screen doors should be easily locked and unlocked.



Windows should be removable from the inside for cleaning.

Window screens should be the kind that can be opened from the inside.

Handles and controls should be selected to avoid unnecessary or sharp protrusions into the room.

Shades, blinds or draperies should be easy to operate and maintain.

Heating System

The need for warmth becomes more acute as one gets older.

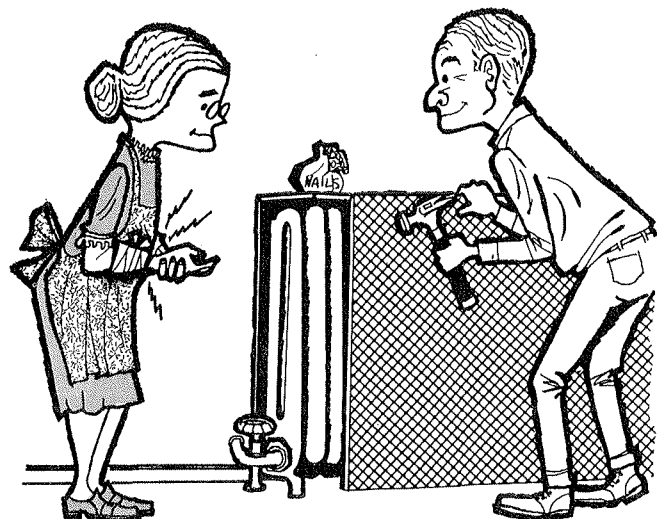
A heating system should distribute heat evenly between 75 and 80 degrees in every room.

Radiators should be shielded to prevent burns.

Portable room heaters can be hazardous and their use should be avoided. Heating systems and room heaters should be checked each year.

A screen for use with open fires should be provided.

A ceiling heat lamp in the bath may increase comfort. A heat lamp can be purchased with a timer should a person be in the bath longer than expected or forget to turn it off. Heating controls should be easily read and color or touch coded when necessary.



Color

Since aging persons spend a great percentage of time within a single non-changing environment, the tools of color, texture and form can do much to alter mood and feeling. Color preferences of individuals should be considered to create an environment pleasing to him. The potential effect of color is known to have certain effects such as the tranquility of green and the warmth of red. Use of color can help call attention to hazardous areas as well as help contribute to a more pleasant surrounding.

Top and bottom steps on stairways can be painted white or a light color.

Burner controls or other knob dials on appliances can be marked with bright colors (yellow and orange) to indicate on, off and different speeds. Fingernail polish or dots of glue may be used as markings.

Medicines for internal use can be marked with a red cross; external medication can be marked with another color.

Light colored walls require less artificial or supplemental light than darker colors.



Lighting

Good lighting is important in any home but is even more important in homes where elderly live since failing eyesight is a condition brought about by the process of aging. The older you get the higher level of illumination you need. In general, the level required is twice that of a younger person.

In a California study on housing for the retired and aged, the most consistent violation of good house design was lighting. The violation was not only in intensity or amount of light but also in kind of light.

Inside a house the problem is too much "light out of place" or glare. Good lighting does not mean expensive lamps or fixtures; rather, it means the right kind of light where it is wanted and needed. A good lighting system shouldn't cost any more than a poor one when planned and installed during the construction of the house. Proper lighting can make a room cheery and bright.

Provide ample lighting for outside porches, steps, walks, driveways, interior stairways, hallways, entryways and all rooms.

Locate three-way light switches at both entrances to a room, just inside the door. The three-way switch allows you to turn lights on and off at both entrances to the room.

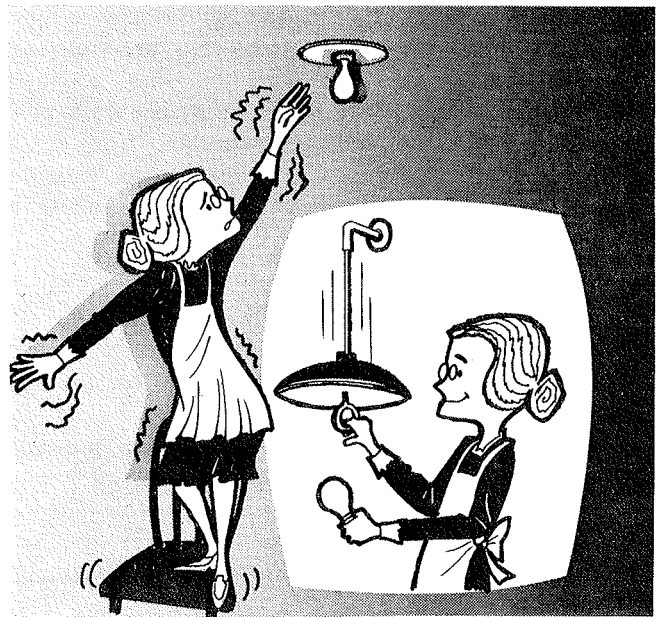
Night lights are desirable in the bedroom and at bathroom entrances. A switch or lamp should be located near the bed. Luminous cover plates for switches make them easy to locate.

All light should be distributed evenly without glare.

Local light should be available for specific tasks such as reading, sewing, hobbies, food preparation and taking

medicine. Lights inside closets and storage areas assist visibility.

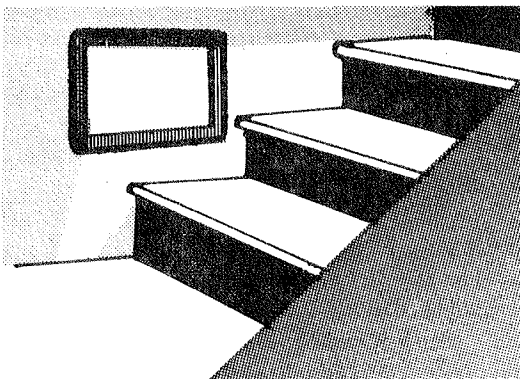
Fixtures should be easy to clean and bulbs easy to change. Portable lamps or pull-down ceiling or wall lamps can be changed *without* a step ladder.



Convenience electrical outlets should be placed where they don't interfere with furniture and when possible about 28 to 30 inches off the floor. This placement prevents the necessity of bending to reach the outlet. Devices can be purchased to prevent sagging cords. There should be outlets near the bed for heating pads, lights, radio and so forth.

Fixtures and wiring should be well-constructed, with an Underwriters Laboratories Seal. This seal indicates that the appliance, plug and cord have been inspected for safety. The round seal with the initial UL may be stamped on the nameplate or attached as a separate label.

Lights should be located at the top and bottom of a stairway or placed to make all steps visible. Switches at both the top and bottom make it possible to turn off the lights at both places.



Recessed lighting helps to prevent glare.

Floors and Doorways

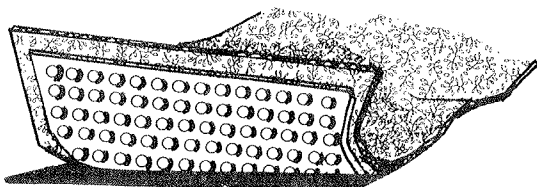
Falls are the major accident problem of the elderly. The floor is probably one of the most neglected areas of the home. To prevent falls make sure floors are as safe as possible.

If scatter rugs are used, they should have non-skid backs or be used with non-skid pads or strips.

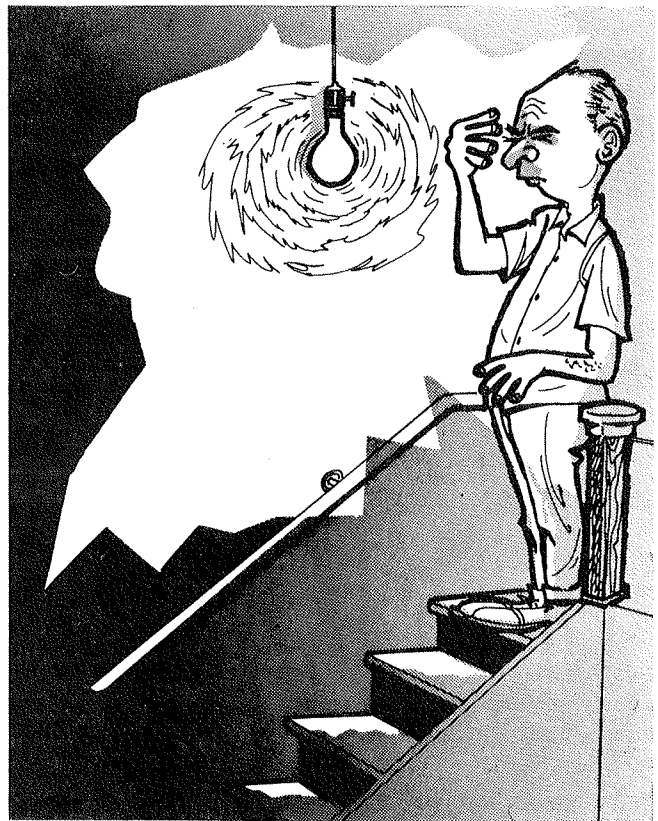
Traffic areas should have a smooth, even flow. Eliminate sills and thresholds on interior doors when they present tripping hazards. Put weather stripping on the bottoms of doors instead of on floors.

Suitable flooring materials include unglazed tile, cork, unwaxed vinyl, asbestos tile, unwaxed wood or wall-to-wall carpeting. If floors are to be waxed, a special slip-resistant wax should be used.

All carpets, rugs or linoleum should lie smooth at the edges. If necessary, tack down.



Non-skid backing for scatter rugs.



Steps, Stairways and Walks

A stairway in the home and exterior steps and walks can be booby traps for persons of any age. Mishaps are more likely to produce serious injury or death to the elderly. Three ways to make stairways, steps and walks less hazardous are to build them correctly, keep them in good condition and use them safely.

Non-slip treads or short pile carpeting on stairs can help prevent falls. Outside patios, walks and steps should have a rough finish that is not slippery when wet.

Walks should be located away from areas where water might accumulate.

Three or more risers should be included when any step is needed.

A level, five-foot-square platform is desirable between steps and the entrance door.

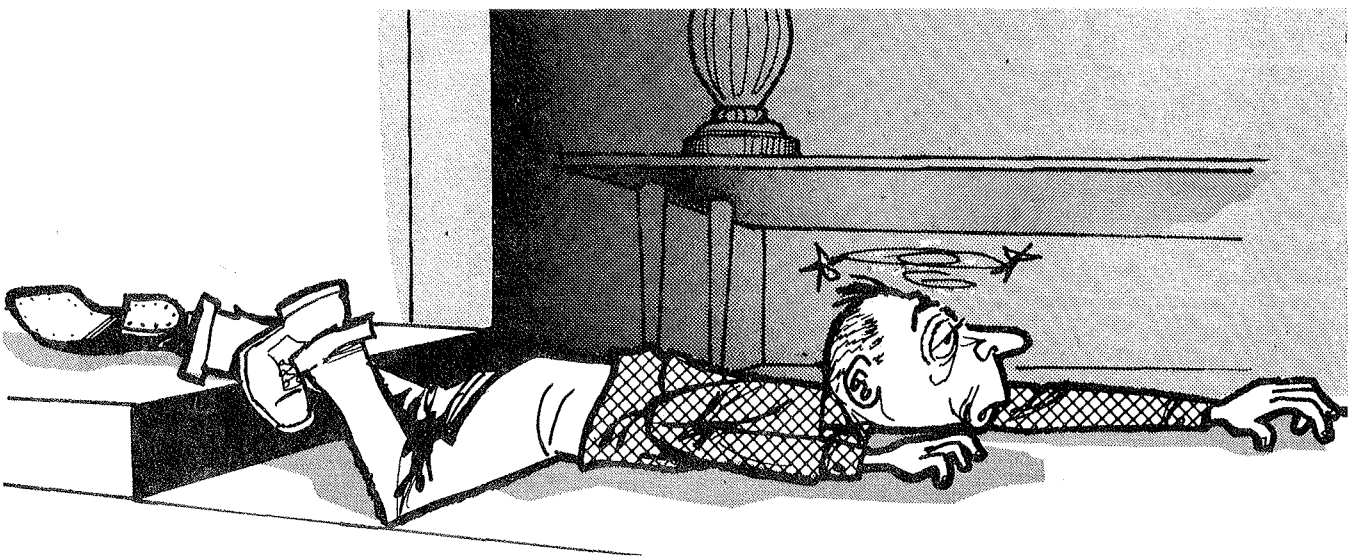
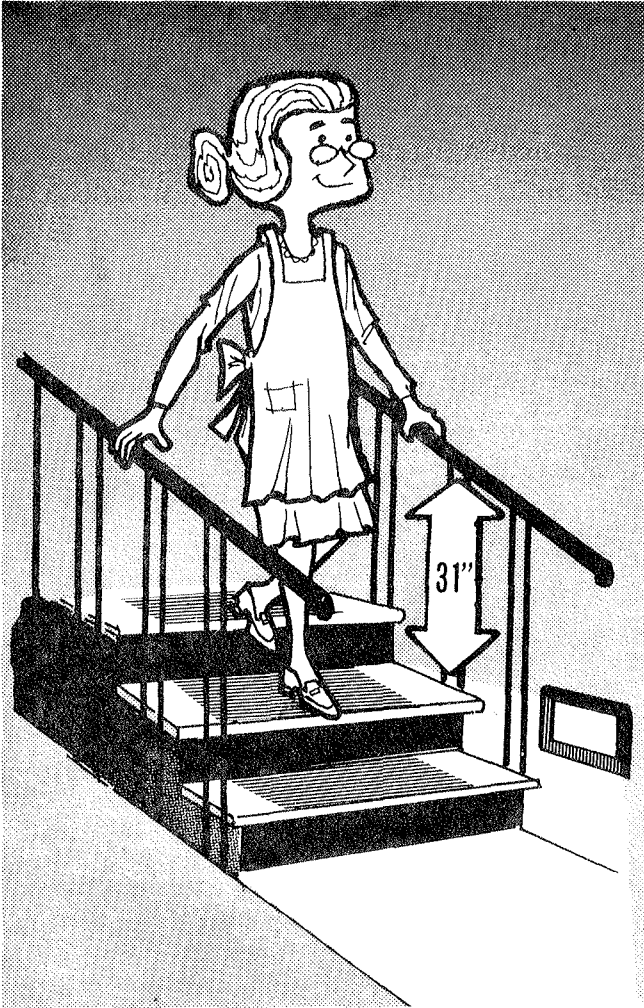
Generous, well-shielded lighting at stairs, walks and steps should be used.

Stairways should not be steep. Risers should be uniform in height, treads uniform in width, and nose uniform in construction. The desirable height for risers is six inches for elderly persons.

Stairways (and in some cases, walks) should have strongly attached handrails on *both* sides. Handrails should extend from top to bottom with ends of a type that won't catch clothing. Railings should be 31 inches high.

Short flights of stairs with landings are preferable to a single straight flight. Rest areas on landings and bottom and top of stairs are desirable.

One-step elevation changes should be eliminated wherever possible. If changes are necessary, a ramp can be used but the rise should not exceed two inches in twelve.



Storage

All people are, to some degree, collectors. The longer we live the more we have collected and the more attached we become to articles that represent fond memories. Useless items should be discarded. Save that which is of real and sentimental value. Treasured possessions need a safe, convenient place in which to be stored, used and enjoyed.

Older people often store some of their children's belongings as well as articles for use when children and grandchildren visit. These requirements add up to considerable storage needs for the small, one- or two-person household.

Storage areas placed between hip and eye level are most accessible without stooping, reaching or climbing.

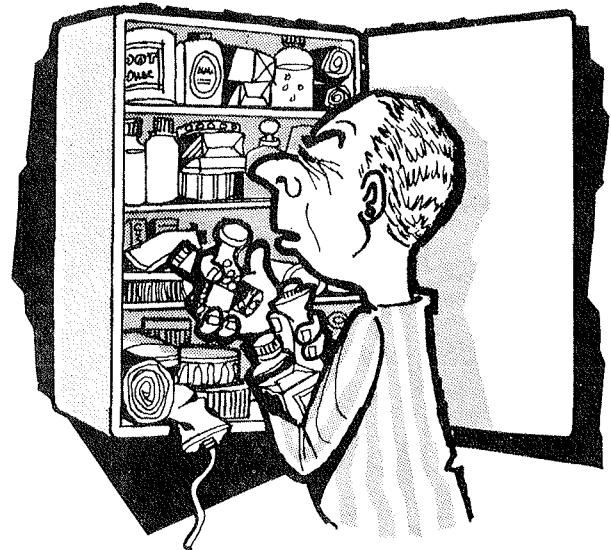
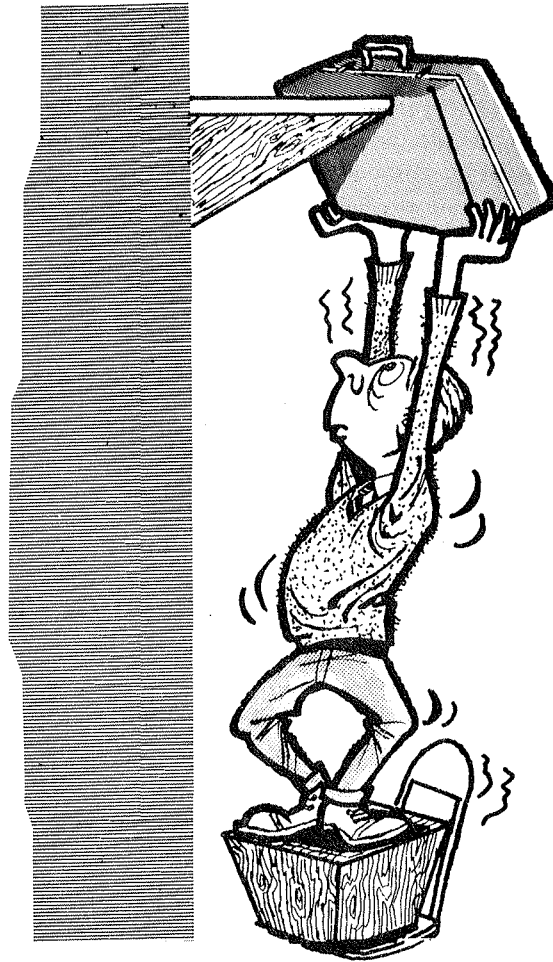
Doors and drawers should operate smoothly and easily.

Drawers should have a stop to keep them from being accidentally pulled all the way out.

Storage areas for hobbies, linens and supplies should be near first point of use.

Ample storage to separate internal and external medications can be extremely important. Separate storage for household cleaners and insecticides should be away from food items.

A "Memory Wall" or storage within view for cherished possessions would be enjoyed.



Furniture

More time is spent by the elderly in sitting than by younger persons, since an older person often carries out his daily chores while sitting.

Chair and bed heights should be low enough to allow the user to place his feet flat on the floor but high enough to make it easy to get up. Although a 17 to 18 inch height is *usually* comfortable, this will differ with the individual.

Drawers should have single pulls rather than double pulls. This allows the person the use of the free hand for support on the chest or cabinet.

Rounded edges and corners on furniture will not cause bruises.

Small pieces of furniture should be stable enough to bear the weight of a person using it as an occasional support.

Furniture should be light enough to move easily for cleaning. Glider tips or casters that do not slide too freely can be placed on all heavy pieces, including the bed.

Chairs should give good body support for lower back and neck for long periods of time.

Chairs should fit the person and not cut off circulation when both feet are flat on the floor. Check the slant of the seat to see if this is too great for the individual's comfort.

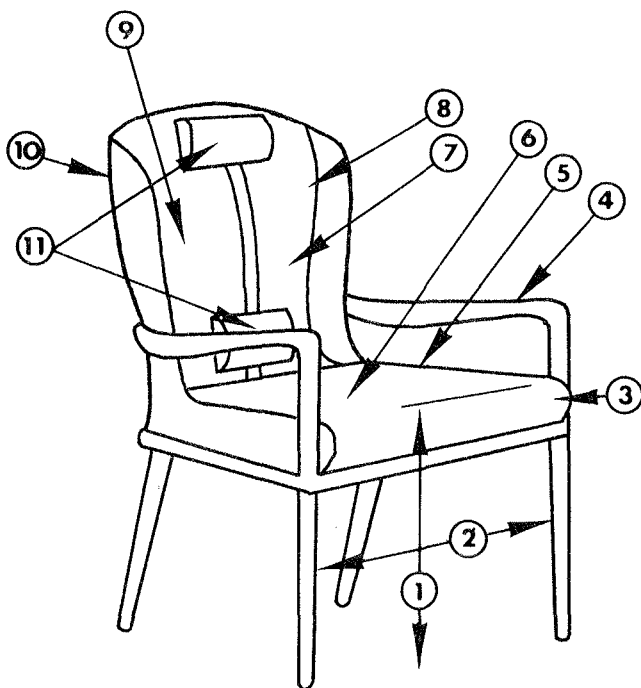
Chair arms should extend far enough forward to allow leverage when a person is sitting down or getting up.

Furniture should be scaled to the size of the room.

Fabrics or materials used in home furnishings should be easily cleaned, stain resistant, flame-resistant, non-allergenic and comfortable.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A CHAIR FOR THE ELDERLY

Diagram prepared by Barbara Laging, University of Nebraska, based on studies in anthropometrics.



- (1) *Top of seat to floor: (Front Height)
15½" - 17" side chair -- 13½" - 15" lounge chair
- (2) Space between front chair legs clear for rising, allowing for forward crouch position.
- (3) Front edge of seat rounded or padded to prevent constriction of blood vessels on back of knee.
- (4) Arm rests of rounded form, preferably higher in front and lower towards back to facilitate knitting and sewing movements. (NCOA Workshop suggested level with floor and adjustable.)
- (5) *Slant of seat: barely perceptible, ½" for side chair, 1½" for lounge.
- (6) *Depth of seat: 18" side chair, 20" lounge chair. (Not too deep.)
- (7) Padding firm, with some resilience.
- (8) *Slant of back rest: under 2" for side chair; 5" for lounge chair. Curve of back rest conforming to horizontal and vertical curves of body.
- (9) Separate cushions for seat and back. Filled-in arm rests would be good addition to hold articles and keep out drafts.
- (10) Wing addition helpful for napping and to keep out drafts.
- (11) Adjustable head rest and lower back pillow that slides up or down to suit individual. (Not too plump, nor too soft.)

**Use individual's body measurements when chair is to be used by one person.*

Bedroom

Whether there is a one-room living-sleeping arrangement or a separate bedroom for the elderly in your home, certain conditions should exist.

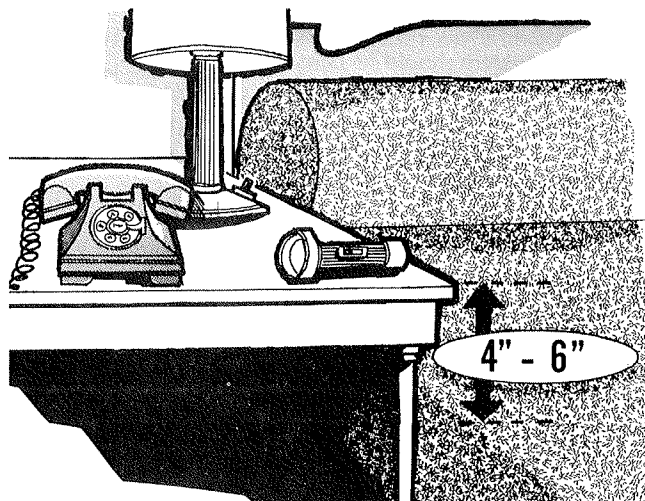
A large bedside table should be provided for medicines, water, light and other items. The table should be high enough to allow a reclining person to see articles on the table (4 to 6 inches above mattress).

A lamp on the bedside table should have a push-button switch on the base for ease of controlling.

A telephone within reach of the bed is desirable.

Access to the bathroom from the sleeping area should be short, direct, clear of furniture and lighted.

One door or window (at least 24 inches wide and no more than 36 inches above the floor) should be in the sleeping area in case of fire. Some method of entrance from the outside should also be provided for assistance in case of fire.



Bathroom

Proper bathroom location, arrangement, fixtures and storage are important to prevent falls, burns or scalds, and poisonings.

Bathtub should be away from windows and drafts.

Bathtub should be low with a flat, skid-resistant bottom, rubber mat or abrasive strips.

Well-anchored grab bars should be provided in the shower or over the tub and at a suitable height and position for those using them. A height of 40 inches from floor to grab bar is *usually* convenient. Use horizontal, vertical or oblique bars. If necessary, portable grab bars can be put on the edge of the tub.

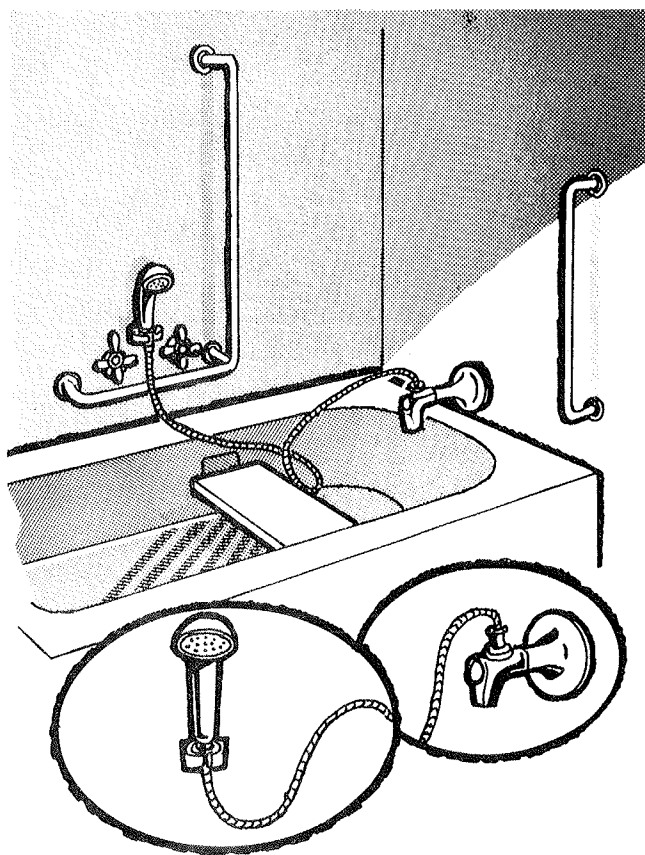
Sturdy supports next to the toilet are important. Grab bars approximately 28 to 32 inches high and with hand clearance of 3 to 4 inches are desirable. A sturdy lavatory close to the toilet might be suitable.

Towel racks of metal or wood, securely attached, for support in emergency are desirable.

A stool, bench or seat may be needed for the tub or shower.

Shower, bathtub and lavatory should have mixing controls, preferably thermostatic mixing valves, to prevent scalds.

Convertible shower heads can be useful.



Bathtub or shower soap dishes should not protrude from the wall.

There should be no storage above the lavatory.

An alarm system should be considered.

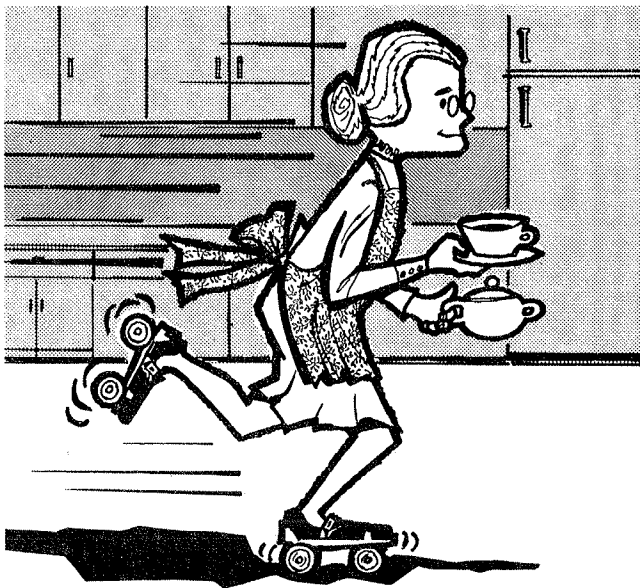
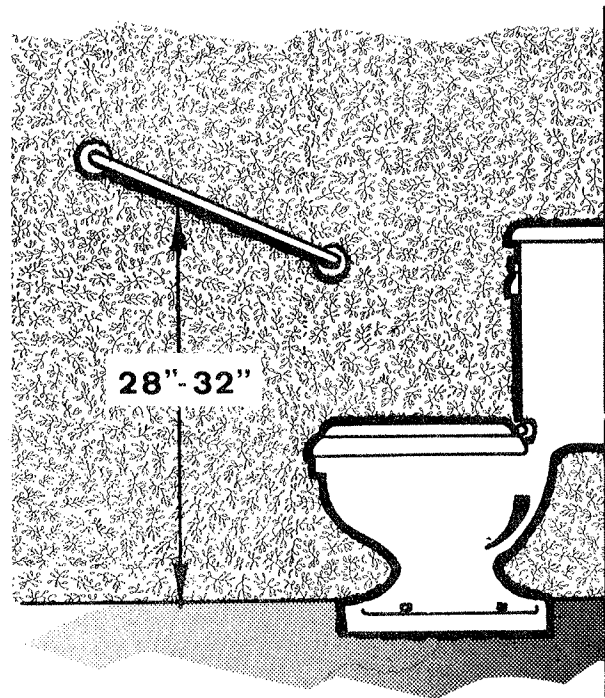
The door should be able to be unlocked from the outside. There should be a light switch outside the door.

The bathroom is best located next to the bedroom and away from steps and stairways.

Bathroom floors should be carpeted or have non-slip surfaces.

Space should be allowed for a second person to assist.

Clothes hooks should be above eye level for safety.



Kitchen

Many accidents occur in the kitchen area. It is also a place where many people spend a great deal of their time and their energy. Since the kitchen is such an important area it should be given careful examination to see if it provides for the needs of the older person.

There should be at least one pull-out board or counter built low enough and with knee space for work in a sitting position. For persons using a wheelchair a 30 to 31 inch height may be necessary. For other persons, a height of 27 inches is usually more comfortable. The height would vary according to the chair used and the individual's height.

Placing a wall oven so that the opened door is at waist height reduces the necessity of stooping or excessive reaching.

Wall cabinets should not be more than 12 inches deep. Shelves higher than 63 inches from the floor should not be used for frequently needed articles. Base cabinets should not have shelves lower than 18 inches from the floor. There should be no cabinets over the refrigerator or range.

Adequate ventilation is necessary to eliminate hot air and cooking odors.

Lights over sink, counters and range are important additions.

Edges and corners of counters, tables and equipment should be rounded.



Cabinets with sliding doors on upper cupboards are preferable, as are vertical pull-out racks or drawers in base cabinets.

Sufficient space (10-12 inches) on either side of the cooking top should be allowed for pan handles to extend without danger of knocking them off.

On electric ranges, elements should glow when lighted and controls should be located so it is not necessary to reach across hot elements.

Controls should be easily read and color or touch coded when desirable.

Gas heating appliances should carry the American Gas Association label, should be vented to the outside, and should be inspected periodically.

Curtains and windows that open should not be placed over a gas range.

Storage of items should be at point of first use.

Items should be stored so that they are easily seen and reached.

Avoid stacking unlike or heavy items when stored.

Store items most frequently used in the most easily accessible areas.



YOUR "AGE-PROOF" HOME

Check List ☒

When you retire you will be spending many more hours in the house or apartment where you choose to reside. Now is the time to make sure your home is safer and more comfortable. As we grow older, we are more likely to suffer serious and costly disabling injuries and deaths from accidents at home. Here are some simple ways to make your home safer, and to prevent accidents from happening in your retirement home.

Whether you are moving into a new house, remodeling a house to suit you, or simply rearranging your house here are some . . .

..Things To Change

- ☐ Rearrange storage so that frequently used items can be stored at levels that don't require stooping, reaching or climbing. Easily accessible storage is between hip and eye level.
- ☐ Mark oven and burner controls so they can be easily read.
- ☐ Add more light on stairways, in kitchen and other danger spots. Relocate switches so that lights can be turned on as a person enters a room, at both ends of a hall, or at top and bottom of stairs.
- ☐ Cut down legs of furniture that is too high for comfortable sitting. Adapt height of bed, couch or chairs that are too low with blocks under the legs or with firm cushions so that it is easy to get up and down.
- ☐ Clear furniture out of traffic lanes to prevent falls, and in the bedroom leave an open path to the window and door for emergencies.
- ☐ Store internal and external medications in separate cabinets or on separate shelves.
- ☐ In new homes, all risers in any flight of stairs should be of uniform height.
- ☐ Remodel all bedrooms so that one window is large enough and low enough for use as an exit in an emergency.
- ☐ Install more electrical convenience outlets, and if possible place some 28 to 30 inches off the floor to eliminate stooping.
- ☐ Repair doors and windows that are difficult to open.
- ☐ Fix loose or ripped carpeting, linoleum and stair treads that could cause falls.
- ☐ Repaint bedroom doors and those leading into the basement or heating plant area with a fire-retardant paint.
- ☐ Have heating systems as well as room heaters checked each year to make sure all are properly working and vented.

..Things To Eliminate

- ☐ Avoid or eliminate one-step elevation changes wherever possible. Ramps can be used in place of steps for safer walking.
- ☐ Throw out clutter everywhere, or items no longer used, to prevent fire and tripping hazards.
- ☐ Get rid of rugs that slide on the floor and all scatter rugs located at the top of stairways.
- ☐ Discard old medicines and containers with unreadable labels to prevent accidental poisonings.
- ☐ Toss out shoes or slippers that don't fit well, and loose-fitting, trailing robes that could be dangerous around fire or cause you to trip.
- ☐ Remove lights that glare and replace them with softer lights.
- ☐ Get rid of heavy kitchen utensils, pots with wobbly or broken handles, worn or frayed electric cords, and all equipment not safe to use.
- ☐ Eliminate sills and thresholds on interior doors when they present tripping hazards.

..Things To Add For Greater Safety

- ☐ Grab bars and hand grips in tub and shower.
- ☐ Adhesive strips, rubber mat or non-slip surface in tub and shower.
- ☐ Built-in seat, bench or stool for bathing.
- ☐ Thermostatic mixing valves in shower and bath.
- ☐ Handrails for all stairs and in some cases hallways.
- ☐ Small, lightweight, stable pots and pans for cooking.
- ☐ Fire or smoke detection systems that give warning in case of fire. All components should be UL listed and installed according to UL specifications.
- ☐ Flame-retardant curtains, bedding, wearing apparel and other fabrics.
- ☐ Lever handles on faucets or ones that are easy to grasp and turn.
- ☐ Screen for fireplace.
- ☐ Solid-core wood doors at head of basement stairs and on bedrooms.
- ☐ Rough finish on outside walks and steps, and non-slip treads or carpeting on inside stairs.
- ☐ Resilient flooring with non-skid finish.

Revised from *Housing For the Elderly* by Home Department, National Safety Council.

