

HOMESTYLE: DOWNSIZING & UNIVERSAL DESIGN



Design for everyone

Adding some small features can make your home safer for daily living

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CTW FEATURES

When most people think about putting grip bars in the shower, widening doors for wheelchairs, installing walk-in bathtubs or removing area rugs to prevent falls, they think about doing this for their aging parents. Think again. Universal design isn't just for seniors.

"Universal design is designing for people of all ages and abilities or disabilities," said Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., the author of the Universal Design Toolkit and president of Rossetti Enterprises, Inc. in

Columbus, Ohio. "I prefer not to think about aging-in-place but rather creating a home that's inclusive so that you can have visitors who might be in a wheelchair, or you can be prepared for anything can happen to anyone at any time."

Rossetti, who was paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, and her husband know what works from experience. After she came home from the hospital in a wheelchair, she realized how her home intensified her disability. She and her husband had to sell their home and find something more suitable. They built a national demon-

stration home and garden in Columbus, Ohio, the Universal Design Living Laboratory, the highest rated universal design home in North America.

But let's say you're only 30 years old and you're healthy and active. Why should you worry about adding universal features to your home or apartment now? Just ask Marni Jameson whose colleague recently had a horrible spinal accident and isn't walking well. "She's in her 30s, is a lawyer and has four kids and needs help, so you never know when there will be a need," said Jameson, a syndicated home and lifestyle col-

umnist and author of *Downsizing the Family Homes*.

Universal design is also helpful for children and young, pregnant women. "Pregnancy is a very precarious situation and you don't want to fall, so putting in grab bars or a chair in the shower will make that woman feel more secure," said Rossetti.

What is a universal design feature? According to The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, universal features are generally standard building products or features that have been placed differently, selected carefully, or omitted. For example, standard elec-

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trical receptacles can be placed higher than usual above the floor, standard but wider doors can be selected, and steps at entrances can be eliminated to make housing more universally usable.

If you're in the process of building your first home, now would be an easy time to add these features at no additional cost. "Putting these precautions in early is an investment in your health and welfare," said Rossetti. "It need not cost anything additional as you're already designing the space and it's an investment so that you don't break your hip or shatter your elbow."

Speaking of broken bones, according to the National Safety Council, in 2017, an estimated 127,300 preventable injury-related deaths occurred in homes and communities, or about 75% of all preventable injury-related deaths that year. There are additional universal design suggestions that you can incorporate in your current home or apartment to help prevent these accidents from occurring:

- Light the way: Jameson encourag-

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es proper floor lighting, especially so you can see at night in the dark.

“Light any change in surface, especially a step,” she said.

- Utilize smart technology: Consumer Affairs magazine suggests incorporating doorways with sensors that alert a family or emergency care service if someone enters a door but doesn’t exit within a specified period of time, indicating that they may need help.

- Replace doorknobs: When you have arthritis or a grip issue, it can be difficult to open the front or bedroom doors. Replacing the round doorknobs will make life a little easier.

- Remove area rugs: Jameson admits that she loves area rugs, but they can curl up on the end, slide out from under your feet or just catch under your shoes, causing falls. A study published by the Journal of Injury & Violence showed that the most common location for fall injuries in the home was the bathroom (35.7%) during the transition

between carpet/rug and non-carpet/rug, on wet carpets or rugs, and while hurrying to the bathroom.

- Install touchless faucets: Family members or visitors who struggle with arthritis or limitations with their hands or arms may find that turning the hot and cold faucets can be difficult. Touchless faucets work with motion sensors and eliminate that struggle.

- One step: Going up and down steps that might be uneven, worn down or broken can cause injuries. The National Association of Home Builders suggests such common design features as no-step entries and one-story barrier-free living.

- Use an expert: Knowing the best features for your home may be difficult on your own, so there are designers and architects who specialize in accessible and universal design and can be hired to help.

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