

the physical disability

FILE

information for and about people with physical disabilities

Universal Home Design Benefits Everyone

For the entire span of our lives, most of us live in some sort of home environment—through youth and old age; through health and illness and, perhaps, disability. Yet our homes often are poorly equipped to adapt to our changing abilities and circumstances. Instead of being built from the start with an entire life span in mind, we make expensive modifications that could be avoided if we plan ahead.

Universal design is based on the idea that products and buildings can be made suitable for everyone from the start. Some benefits of universal home design are:

- ① it requires less cost up-front, compared to expensive after-the-fact renovation;
- ① it makes a home accessible to all visitors, no matter what their needs;
- ① it enables you to fully and comfortably utilize your home if you become ill or acquire a disability; and
- ① it makes homes more user-friendly to people who have impairments due to aging.

Constructing a home according to universal design principles means attention to architectural factors such as the following.

- ① One entry to the home is level inside and out, with no steps to impede people with mobility limitations.
- ① Exterior doors and interior hallways are at least 36 inches wide to accommodate wheelchairs.
- ① Environmental, utility and appliance controls are positioned at heights that are within easy reach of people using a wheelchair or scooter.
- ① Bathroom walls are reinforced to permit attachment of grab bars.
- ① At least one bathroom is located on the main floor for people who cannot climb stairs or have difficulty doing so.
- ① Lever-style door handles are used to accommodate people with disabilities.

For more information, visit the web sites maintained by the Center for Universal Design at www.ncsu.edu/project/design-projects/udi/ and the Trace Center at <http://trace.wisc.edu>.

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