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Modifying Your Home

After Stroke

If you are having problems at home with activities of daily living such as bathing or transferring from the bed to a wheelchair, you can obtain a doctor's orders to have an occupational therapist (OT) assess your home. OTs go through each room and identify problem areas and suggest changes to make you more functional and independent. Many of the adaptations are simple and do not cost a lot. Here are some suggestions I have given my clients that could work for you.

Since most falls occur in the bathroom, I investigate it very carefully. Coming in or out of a wet, slippery bathtub and shower can be difficult. One solution is to mount grab bars. Your OT can tell you where you need to position the bars.

Also, get rid of sliding glass doors because they can be dangerous. A curtain is much safer.

One of my clients improved his functioning in the bathroom by buying a pole that goes from the ceiling to the floor. He had one installed right outside the bath tub so he could hold onto it while getting in and out of the tub. The pole cost him about \$100.

Another easy bathroom adaptation is to make or buy soap on a rope. I made one for one of my clients by poking a hole through a bar of soap with an awl and then running thick cord through the hole.

Bath chairs allow you to sit while taking a shower, which is much safer. There are many models to choose from. A hand-held shower extension can help if you are using a chair in the bath or shower. If your wheelchair does not fit through the doorway or inside the bathroom, you will likely have to remodel. Consider buying a bedside commode instead.



Beds are often too low. To solve this, get an electric-elevation bed or put your bed on blocks. My client who had the pole installed by his bath also put one by his bed so he could pull himself out of bed. It helped him gain his balance when standing. This simple adaptation helped him to be more independent and reduced the amount of assistance from his wife, who has arthritis.

Many people like to sit in recliner chairs. To help get out of one, raise its level by having a carpenter build a box base for the recliner. Electric models allow you to adjust the chair's height. Wooden blocks under your couch also make it easier for you to stand.

For all rooms in the house, put a non-slip pad under throw rugs so they stay put when you walk on them. If you are in a wheelchair, consider removing rugs altogether.

For those survivors who need maximum help in the home, purchasing or renting a lift may make the difference between living at home comfortably and needing to live at a nursing home. Lifts are expensive but often necessary for the caregiver.

They can be used to lift the survivor in and out of bed or in and out of the bathtub. The exact model should be determined by your therapist. Certain kinds of adaptive equipment are covered by Medicare. Consult your Medicare provider or your occupational therapist.

Many simple modifications can make your home safer and help you function a lot more easily and with greater independence. Talk to your occupational therapist and physician about having your home assessed. ■

Editor's Note: Jan Davis is a member of our magazine review panel and President of International Clinical Educators.