



Ask an Expert – Changes to Your Home So You Can “Age In Place”

Q: I am in my mid-seventies, and although my arthritis is getting worse, and it's difficult for me to get up and down the stairs in my home, I love my neighbourhood and would not want to leave the familiar places and friends that I have made over many years. Are there changes I can make to my current home that will help me live here longer?

Yes, there are a number of ways you can adapt your current home to meet your needs and accommodate your arthritis, while allowing you to remain there for many years yet. Here are some of my suggestions:

1. Switch to easy-to-use home hardware

Replace your circular doorknobs with door handles that open with a push, not a twist. Nobody wants to be stuck behind a closed door because turning the knob has become difficult! This simple step will help you stay in control of your privacy, comfort and mobility, and can be accomplished both simply and quickly. A handy friend or family member is probably capable of installing new door handles, leaving only the cost of the hardware.

2. Put your kitchen items within easy reach

Move your most-used kitchen utensils to spots within easy access, and get some help in clearing out the rest of the “clutter”. Most people with a family-sized kitchen and a long period of residence own dishes, containers and utensils that haven't seen daylight in 10 years or more. You may also have a surplus of empty plastic containers, or spices and bottles that “might come in handy” – and they are taking over your cupboards.

Go through your kitchen with a helper and determine what you actually use on a regular basis. Let the rest go – either to family or friends, or to a charity, or even into the garbage. Most spice powders lose their flavour after a year or so, and many seniors need far fewer dishes than they actually have. Once this has been done, you may find excellent cupboard space in a more accessible part of the kitchen. Put things near eye or waist level, to keep reaching and stooping to a minimum.

3. End the struggle with stairs

Consider moving all your living space onto one level. You may find that the only reason you go downstairs anymore is to do the laundry. Rather than risk injury going downstairs with a full laundry hamper, you can install a small washer and dryer in the main level of your house. Likewise, you can convert a “spare” room on the main floor into your bedroom.

Alternately, you can glide up and down the stairs by contracting professionals to install a chair lift or other mobility aid. Changing Places can help find the right installer for you.

All of these changes take some work and decision-making, and you may find the process to be much easier with a caring, objective helper to listen to you and support you. Changing Places has helped hundreds of people to downsize and adapt their current residences – we can help you, too!

Call Changing Places at 250-721-4490 for a free consultation. We're always happy to hear from you!