

The Caregivers Dream House

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As you drive up to the house, you notice no steps are to be seen on the outside. That could be a good thing for an elderly or handicapped visitor or occupant, even if wheelchair bound or for small children who may be challenged by steps. This could be a zero step house or maybe even better a Universal Design house.

Such a house can have overall beauty and comfort as well as be easier to move furniture around inside, to bring in furniture or to carry in groceries. Here's why.

1. Electrical outlet heights are raised from the standard 12 inches to 18 inches from the floor making them easier to use by everyone, including wheelchair-bound adults and children.
2. Light switches are lowered to make them more accessible for everyone, including those sitting in a wheelchair and children.
3. The standard door widths of 28 to 32 inches are too narrow to accommodate a walker or a wheelchair. Door widths can be widened which makes the home feel more spacious as well as more functional.
4. In kitchens and bathrooms with a wider turning space of at least 60", a wheelchair has a sufficient turning radius for a 360 degree turn around. At the same time one can create a feeling of spaciousness in these often used areas.
5. Sills on exterior doors are an unnecessary barrier to entry as well as a tripping hazard. By eliminating raised sills on exterior doors you will create a smoother transition into the home while making it more accessible.

If one is building a new home, the extra cost for the above items could be about \$1,000.

Other features in the home would be:

1. White stainless steel grab bars in the bathroom at a height of about 3 feet to the center of the bar.
2. Vanities and kitchen cabinets at 33" high with open spaces in the front for a wheelchair to roll up to. The lower cabinets would have a taller toe kick space to pull out drawers.
3. Levered handles on all doors, including bathroom and kitchen faucets with temperature control on the faucets.
4. Rather than a bathtub, have a shower which can easily be walked into or rolled into in a wheelchair.

When surveyed, a very high percentage of people preferred to be cared for in their own home rather than go to an assisted living or skilled nursing facility. That's why it makes sense to make one's home care recipient/caregiver friendly.

Besides the suggestions at the beginning of this article, other new technology-based products can enhance caregiving in the home. Emergency response systems can bring help at the touch of a button. Instruments linked to the telephone lines can measure, record and notify outside medical resources or long-distance caregivers about the status of the care recipient. Automated systems can provide medication distribution. Blood pressure and sugar levels for diabetes and other medical conditions can be also be monitored with easy to use devices designed for home use.

For the most comprehensive information about caregiving, go to www.caregiverresource.net or call the Area on Agency of Western Michigan at (616) 456-5664 or toll free at (888) 456-5664. Information for this article was provided in part by TRY Construction at www.tryconstruction.com (269-795-7743), and the Zero Step website at www.zerostep.org or (616-949-7865).

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.