

# Caregiver's Corner Column (June 2012)

## **There's No Place Like Home**

By Joanne Feutz

Occupational Therapist, Certified Aging in Place Specialist

Disability Advocates of Kent County

Springtime is a great time for home improvements that can make your home more comfortable through all seasons of life. If you are one of the many Americans caring for a loved one in your home, this information will be very useful. Increasing safety and convenience in daily care giving tasks can be accomplished by making simple home improvements, using easy assistive devices and adding universal design features to your home.

Universal design, according to The Center of Universal Design at North Carolina State University, is designing products and the environment to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Universal design can make your home more user-friendly. As one's physical abilities change, the home will be able to meet ones needs and easily adapt to those changes. As a caregiver this means your home can support you every step of the way.

### **1. Preparing your home for your role of caregiver.**

Planning for a main floor bathroom and bedroom can eliminate steps and reduce falls. Determining the space needed for wheelchairs or walkers, privacy (for both the caregiver and the care recipient) as well as the day-to-day tasks of caregiving can increase convenience. Some simple, no-cost examples are placing a sturdy chair at the bedside for dressing, or rearranging furniture to create clear walkways, as well as private space.

### **2. Eliminating barriers in a home improves mobility and independence.**

Adequate lighting is important in all walkways, especially night lights along the pathway to the bathroom. Painting a bathroom wall a contrasting color can make it easier to see and use a tub or toilet fixture without tripping and falling for people who may be confused or have decreased vision. For under \$20, you can replace standard door hinges with offset hinges that widen narrow doorways to allow access for walker and wheelchair users. Removing casters from the legs of beds can eliminate the need for step stools and assistance in getting on and off of tall bed mattresses. Remove loose throw rugs in walkways and add non slip bath mats in tubs.

### **3. Removing risks increases safety.**

Installing a door or gate at entry to stairs, or a sturdy handrail on steps can increase safety and reduce fall risks. You can modify a bathroom for safety without ever swinging a hammer. A tub chair and hand held shower reduces slipping on wet tubs by enabling you to sit during a shower. A raised toilet seat and toilet handrails help you get up and down with less effort, better balance, and less risk of falling.

### **4. Selecting universal design products increases convenience and ease of use for all ages and abilities.**

Lever handles on door knobs and faucets can be easier to use for someone with arthritis. Electric jar openers make opening pickle jars and other hard to open food jars easier. A long reacher can help you pick up items from the floor without bending and losing your balance. Turn any lamp into a touch lamp with a simple \$10 adapter.

Remember that you do not walk the caregiver path alone. Occupational Therapists can work with you to gain ideas to prepare your home for your caregiving role. There are equipment loan closets and funding options for assistive devices and home modifications for those who meet the eligibility criteria. For further information and assistance visit the website of Caregiver Resource Network at [www.caregiverresource.net](http://www.caregiverresource.net) or contact Disability Advocates of Kent County at 616-949-1100.

*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](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664