

Home comfort and convenience

By Linda Norton, MSCH, BSc OT, OT Reg (Ont)



Our home is the place where we can go to relax and recuperate, entertain friends and family and carry out a number of activities. Regardless of whether your home is a house, condominium, apartment or room within a care facility, there are a number of ways to make your living area more comfortable and convenient.

The first two steps—remove clutter and ensure good lighting—have been discussed in previous articles. However, their importance cannot be overemphasized. It's time to take another good look around your home for your clutter spots...especially areas where you regularly walk (e.g., the stairs or the floor near the couch). Although you may have become used to walking around items such as laundry baskets, shoes and shopping bags, it is better to keep the way clear to prevent a fall.

Clutter on flat surfaces such as tables can also pose a challenge. Items may get accidentally get knocked over, or you might quickly need a clear space to put down a hot drink. There are many books and websites about organizing your home, so choose a method that makes sense to you and begin. The common theme to all of the methods, though, is to take a small area at a time, and consider doing it in short bursts. Even 15 minutes a day can make a huge difference. The key is to start somewhere.

Quick tip

Share your ideas for making tasks easier with friends and family. They may have valuable hints for you too!

Lighting

Ensuring good lighting is also key to safety and comfort. It's time to look at your home with fresh eyes and to identify the places where more or different lighting is needed. Consider the use of task lighting where specific activities occur—for example, a reading lamp near your favourite chair. Extra lighting over the kitchen counter may make food preparation easier. Consider the lighting required at different times of the day, too. You may want to put some lights on timers so they automatically go on when they are needed. Lighting at night is also needed for the pathway to the washroom, within the washroom itself and in other places you may want to go at three in the morning (e.g., to the kitchen for a snack). As we get older, it is more difficult to transition from areas of full light into dim areas, so night lights or salt crystal lamps may work better in these areas than turning on overhead lights.

Cleaning

Cleaning the home is a necessary task that many people find difficult to do, or find hard on their body. One way to manage tasks is to delegate. If there are others living with you, divide the jobs among everyone and find a job each person can do. If possible, consider hiring someone to come into your home to do the cleaning, or at least the more physically

demanding activities. In some communities there are organizations that will help seniors or people with disabilities with these tasks as well as with small home-maintenance jobs.

If you are doing the cleaning yourself, look for the easiest way to accomplish what you need to do. For example, long-handled dust pans will help you avoid stooping when sweeping. Long-handled scrub brushes are available for cleaning the tub or shower, and again help prevent stooping and working in awkward positions. You can also save time and energy by soaking your dishes before washing them, and once washed leave them in the dish rack to air dry.



bed is the best it can be. Memory-foam mattresses or toppers may be more comfortable if you experience aches and pains. However, it can be more difficult to turn over on these surfaces or transfer off them, so make sure you try these activities before making a purchase.

If you do have trouble rising from

the bed, consider the use of a grab bar. One type is called a bed cane, which is available with handy pockets. These pockets can be used to store items that you may need during the night

in easy reach.

If you occasionally travel, a “travel advantage” bed rail is available. This folds and is easy to take with you from place to place.

Wearing jewellery is fun, but it is often difficult to manage tricky clasps. Consider using

continued on page 18

Quick tips

- Invest the time to clear clutter.
- Look at your home with “new eyes”.
- Find the tasks that are becoming difficult and tackle them first.

In the bedroom

People spend on average eight hours per day sleeping, so it makes sense to ensure your

Bathtub Accessibility a Problem?

Convert an **existing bathtub** into a safe and accessible step-in shower in a matter of hours.

Bathway’s unique “**Tub Cutting**” service is a quick and economical alternative to messy, disruptive and costly bathroom remodeling.

Ask us about our new door system!



Bathway

SAFETY > INDEPENDENCE > DIGNITY

GTA 416-222-5333

Toll free 1-888-778-3746

info@bathway.ca □ www.bathway.ca



magnetic adaptors that attach to each side of the necklace or bracelet. Once they are in place, you can bring the two ends of the necklace or bracelet together where they will be securely held by the magnetic clasp.

Living areas

It can be difficult to get up from a favourite couch or chair because it is too low to the ground. There are a couple of ways to address this issue. Firstly, special blocks can be placed under the legs of the furniture. These blocks hold the furniture legs securely and can raise the height by several inches.

If raising the furniture in this manner is not possible, consider the use of an uplift seat. This device sits on the chair or couch and provides a boost as you stand. The manual model works by sensing when you lean forward to stand, and automatically rises. The powered model allows you to control the timing and rate at which the unit rises. Because you will be sitting in it a lot, make sure the uplift seat is comfortable before you purchase it. Note that these devices are not recommended for people who have or are at risk of developing pressure ulcers.

Another alternative is a lift chair. This looks like an easy chair, but has an electronic control and a motor that raises the chair when you wish to stand. It can stay in this elevated position until you go to sit, when it will gently lower you down to a sitting position. Many of these chairs also have a massage and/or heating unit and can recline for comfort. If space is an issue, some of the chairs require less room to recline than others. Once again, measure and test the chair before you purchase it.

Consider placing a small chair or bench in the entryway to your home as a convenient place to sit when putting on or taking off your shoes and boots. A small but high stool in the kitchen also provides a convenient place to sit when working at the counter or stove.

Communication

Telephones can be adapted with large numbers, making it easier to see to dial. If remembering names and numbers is the issue, some telephones have picture buttons. Dialling is as easy as lifting the receiver and pushing the button with the picture of the person you want to call. Many of these same telephones have volume controls that enable the user to increase the volume to make the conversation easier to hear.

Computers are much more common in the homes of seniors these days. Most computers have some accessibility features built right in that allow the icons and print on the screen to be maximized to reduce eye strain. Background colours can also be changed to increase the contrast. Furthermore, the speed that the mouse moves the pointer on the screen can be adjusted, as well as the speed of the “double click.”

Regardless of where you live, things can be done to make your home more comfortable and convenient. As you identify tasks within your home you wish were easier, write them down and then share this list with others. You may find your friends, family and health professionals have some clever solutions, and you may also be able to share some of yours. ●



Linda Norton, MSCH, BSc, OT, OT Reg (Ont), is the Rehabilitation Education Co-ordinator with Shoppers Home Health Care.

“For fixing things around the house, nothing is handier than a man with a chequebook.”

Anonymous