

Remodeling Today for a Better Tomorrow

Design ideas for the kitchen and bathroom.





Stay in the home you love. Love the home you're in.

Your home is more than four walls and a roof. Filled with the people and things you love, it tells the story of your life. No wonder most people age 45+ say they want to stay in their current homes for as long as possible.

The design of your home is key to fulfilling that goal. And remodeling is the perfect opportunity to integrate design ideas that will allow you to live comfortably in your home for a lifetime.

Universal Design, also referred to as Livable Design or Better Design, means creating an environment that's easy for everyone to use — regardless of age, size or ability. It emphasizes convenience, simplicity, flexibility and adaptability. And it goes beyond accessibility to include style at its very core.

By incorporating this type of design into remodeling projects for two of the most important rooms of your house — your kitchen and bathroom — you will help ensure that you can live safely and independently even as your needs change.

This guide provides smart ideas and solutions to help you incorporate Universal Design into your kitchen and bathroom when you remodel — and live comfortably and independently in the home you love.



3 things to know about Universal Design

1 It's good for everyone.

Typical homes are designed to fit “average” families. Yet some of their features don't fit anyone at all. Deep kitchen cabinets with fixed shelves, for example, are difficult regardless of your age or size. Universally designed cabinets, which include pull-out drawers and easy-to-grab handles, are convenient for most everyone. A universally-designed home works well for all.

2 It's especially important as we age.

While most of us remain healthy and active as we age, we may still experience changes in strength, flexibility, balance and reach. Universal Design features make it easier for us to adjust to these changes; our living environment accommodates the changes rather than creating barriers. And if we do have age-related health conditions, these features are even more important to allow us to live conveniently, comfortably, and safely at home for a lifetime.

3 It's easy to incorporate into your home.

A kitchen or bathroom remodel is a great time to incorporate Universal Design features. Not remodeling now? Some changes, like updating faucets and handles, can be made at any time. You'll be amazed at the positive impact even simple changes can make — and how stylish and attractive your “home for a lifetime” can be.

Remodeling ideas for the kitchen



Flooring

- When selecting flooring such as linoleum, vinyl, wood, or ceramic tiles, choose materials that are slip-resistant, even-surfaced, low-glare, durable and easy to maintain.
- Creating plenty of open floor space makes it easy to maneuver around the kitchen. Allow at least 3 feet to 4 feet around appliances and cabinets.

Thresholds

- To ease movement between the kitchen and adjacent rooms, lower thresholds to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, add angled wedges, or — even better — eliminate thresholds altogether.



Light switches

- Consider installing rocker switches, which can be turned on and off with the back of your hand or elbow if hands are full. Some rocker switches have a back-lit feature that makes them visible in the dark.
- Lighting controls can be easier to reach by making small adjustments in their location. Mount switches 42 inches to 48 inches above the floor and outlets 18 inches to 24 inches above the floor.



Lighting

- Supplement natural light with lighting from multiple sources. These may include under-cabinet lights, track lighting, recessed lighting or pendants that hang from the ceiling.
- Add glare-free task lighting over the sink, stove, countertops, and island work areas.

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Appliances

- Consider a wall oven, which can reduce the need to bend with hot or heavy items.
- Of the many types of refrigerators available, a side-by-side, bottom-freezer or drawer model can allow for easy reach of otherwise hard-to-get items.

Hardware

- Select easy-to-grasp D- or U-shaped pulls, rather than round knobs, for cabinet doors and drawers.
- Soft auto-close hardware allows doors and drawers to open and close with just a touch.

Cabinets and cupboards

- A pull-out shelf installed directly below or next to a wall oven or microwave will make it safer to remove hot foods.
- It's easier to access storage space in base cabinets if you install pullout drawers rather than fixed shelving.
- Consider adjustable-height shelving and lazy susans in corner cupboards.

Countertops

- Creating countertop areas at differing heights will provide work options for people of various heights, ages and abilities. As an alternative, install pull-out cabinetry or removable cabinet doors and shelves so you can work while seated.

Sinks and faucets

- For the simplest operation of your faucets, select single-lever handles rather than two separate knobs or handles.
- Install pressure-balanced faucets (which help regulate temperature during changes in water pressure), and keep the temperature at 120 degrees or lower to avoid burns or scalding.

Remodeling ideas for the bathroom



Flooring

- When selecting flooring such as linoleum, vinyl, or ceramic tiles, choose materials that are slip-resistant, even-surfaced, low-glare, durable and easy to maintain.
- Creating plenty of open floor space makes it easy to get around. Allow at least 30 inches by 48 inches of clear floor space between fixtures; 60 inches by 60 inches is ideal.



Grab bars

- Install properly placed and supported grab bars to your tub/shower area to provide an easy way to steady yourself in a slippery environment. Select colors or finishes that contrast with the wall for better visibility and to complement your décor. Some styles double as a decorative towel bar (but are built to withstand weight).
- If you're not interested in grab bars now, add plywood “blocking” between wall studs around the toilet and tub/shower for additional reinforcement so that grab bars can be added later.



Doorways and thresholds

- To ease movement between the bathroom and adjacent hallways or rooms, lower thresholds to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, add angled wedges, or eliminate thresholds altogether.
- Maximize doorway widths (32 inches minimum; 36 inches preferred) by installing swing-clear door hinges or installing pocket doors.
- Replace door knobs with lever handles, which are easier to grasp and allow the door to be opened with a wrist, forearm or elbow.

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Lighting

- Supplement natural light with lighting from multiple sources, such as track lighting or recessed fixtures in the ceiling. To reduce glare, use fixtures that shield your eyes from the light source.
- Install lighting over the bathtub and shower to increase safety.

Light switches

- Consider installing rocker switches, which can be turned on and off with the back of your hand or elbow if hands are full. Some rocker switches have a backlit feature that makes them visible in the dark.
- Lighting controls can be easier to reach by making small adjustments in their location. Mount switches at 42 inches to 48 inches above the floor, and outlets 18 inches to 24 inches above the floor.

Tub and shower

- Install non-skid strips, textured surfaces or non-slip tile in the bathtub/shower to reduce the risk of falls.
- Install an adjustable-height, handheld shower hose (60 inches to 72 inches), with controls that are conveniently placed and easy to operate.
- Consider installing a walk-in shower with little or no threshold or lip to step over. Ideally, that threshold should be no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and beveled to provide a tiny ramp rather than a tripping hazard. Slope the shower floor a maximum of $\frac{1}{8}$ inch per foot.
- Shower size minimum should be 36 inches x 36 inches. For a roll-in shower, allow 36 inches x 60 inches.
- Install a built-in or fold-down seat in the shower area to allow someone to sit while bathing.

- If choosing a tub, look for one with a built-in seat or deck to make it easier to get into and out of the tub. You can also find tubs with stylishly integrated grab bars.

Vanity and cabinets

- Create clearance under the sink and extend flooring material into the open area underneath to allow someone to sit while using the sink.
- Select easy-to-grasp D- or U-shaped pulls rather than round knobs for cabinet doors and drawers.



Faucets and controls in sink, tub and shower

- For the simplest operation of your faucets, select single-lever handles rather than two separate knobs or handles.
- Install pressure-balanced faucets (which help regulate temperature during changes in water pressure) and keep the temperature at 120 degrees or lower to avoid burns or scalding.
- Select controls that clearly identify hot and cold temperatures, with “H”/“C” or red/blue.

Toilet

- Consider installing a “comfort height” toilet with a seat height of 17 inches to 19 inches (instead of a typical toilet height of 14 inches to 16 inches) for ease of use.

Where to find more information

The following resources can help you learn more about design solutions for a better tomorrow.

Your contractor or designer

If you're working with a contractor, remodeler or designer, let them know you want a home that fits your needs today *and* tomorrow. Many have experience with different design features and can help you create a space that's stylish, functional and flexible.

- Discuss your options and the benefits of one over another. Don't hesitate to ask for pictures or drawings.
- If you're unfamiliar with any design features, ask questions. Your contractor or designer can explain how a pressure-balanced faucet works, for example, or show you different flooring samples to compare those that are slip-resistant with those that are not.
- Ask your contractor for guidance. Even if you don't want to install grab bars now, for example, discuss the benefits of adding plywood blocking between wall studs now to simplify installation down the road.

University of Southern California

The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence at the University of Southern California's Leonard Davis School of Gerontology offers helpful resources on fall prevention and home modification for older adults and their families and caregivers. For more information, visit www.homemods.org/resources.

Certified professionals

The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), in collaboration with AARP, developed the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) program to teach professionals how to modify homes for aging in place. To learn more or find a CAPS specialist in your area, visit www.nahb.org.

The University of Southern California's Executive Certificate in Home Modification (ECHM) program teaches professionals how to assess and modify homes for aging in place. Visit www.homemods.org for more information.

AARP

AARP offers educational materials and resources with smart solutions for making a home comfortable, safe and a great fit. Visit www.aarp.org/homefit.

For more than 40 years, The Hartford has recognized the unique and changing needs of people over the age of 50. Our team of gerontologists have partnered with leading universities including the University of Southern California, to conduct original research and produce public education programs on safety, mobility and independence.



The Hartford would like to acknowledge the University of Southern California Andrus Gerontology Center for providing the Universal Design suggestions in this guide.

This guide is intended to help individuals who seek information about the kinds of changes that can be made to a home environment to increase comfort, convenience and safety. It is not intended to be an exhaustive source or to relate to a particular housing situation. Readers are advised to consult the appropriate professionals to assist them in analyzing their situation.

Photos on page 4 (floor and light fixtures) and page 6 (shower and door handle) by Mary Jo Peterson, kitchen/bath/universal designer, Brookfield, CT, www.mjpdesign.com.