

# MAINTAINING SENIORS' INDEPENDENCE THROUGH HOME ADAPTATIONS



A Self-Assessment Guide



## CMHC—HOME TO CANADIANS

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has been Canada's national housing agency for more than 60 years.

Together with other housing stakeholders, we help ensure that the Canadian housing system remains one of the best in the world. We are committed to helping Canadians access a wide choice of quality, environmentally sustainable and affordable homes – homes that will continue to create vibrant and healthy communities and cities across the country.

For more information, visit our website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)

You can also reach us by phone at 1-800-668-2642  
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Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation supports the Government of Canada policy on access to information for people with disabilities. If you wish to obtain this publication in alternative formats, call 1-800-668-2642.

# Maintaining Seniors' Independence Through Home Adaptations

**A Self-Assessment Guide**

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre :  
*Maintenir l'autonomie des aînés par l'adaptation des logements :  
guide d'évaluation pour les aînés (61276)*

# Introduction

The overwhelming majority of seniors wish to continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible. However, many homes are not well designed to meet our changing needs as we age.

This Guide identifies the types of difficulties that seniors can experience and describes types of adaptations that can help overcome these difficulties.

## Using the Guide

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Each of the sections of this Guide, listed in the Table of contents on page iii, deals with an activity in the home. In using each section of the Guide, first decide whether you are having difficulty with the described activity. If you are, examine the types of adaptations described in the section and decide whether any could help you. If you can think of a useful adaptation that is not described in the Guide, you can write a brief description in the appropriate section, so that you have a complete record of the adaptations you are considering.

Although this Guide is designed to assist you in assessing your own needs, you may wish to ask a family member or friend to help you answer the questions. Sometimes a second pair of eyes will spot something you have overlooked.

# Getting the work done

You, a family member or a friend may possess the knowledge and special skills required to successfully carry out some of the adaptations you have identified.

However, if you are going to get a contractor to carry out the work, it is advisable to obtain more than one estimate. This Guide, complete with your notes and descriptions, can be used as the basis for obtaining tenders and negotiating with the contractors.

You may have to be selective in choosing adaptations in order to stay within your budget, so be sure to concentrate on the adaptations that will be of most benefit to you. Every house and every person's requirements are different, so be sure you agree only to adaptations that you need and want.

You may wish to visit Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) website, at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca), to find additional information.

If your home is rented, you should check with your landlord and obtain written confirmation verifying that the proposed adaptations may be made.

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# Getting in and out of the home

## I.1 Do you have any difficulty walking from the garage, the backyard or the street to your door?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Repair holes or uneven joints in walking surfaces that could cause tripping
- Widen walkway
- Add steps to remove steep slope
- Add a ramp to bypass existing steps
- Install or repair handrails along walkway, ramp and steps
- Provide non-slip finish on walking surfaces
- Other (describe)

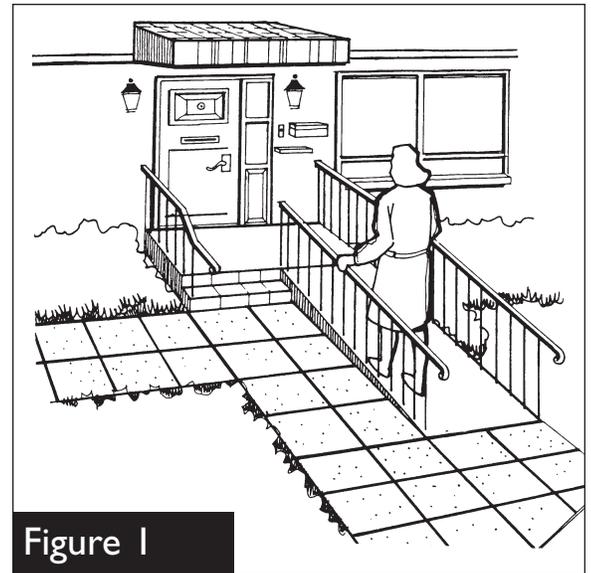


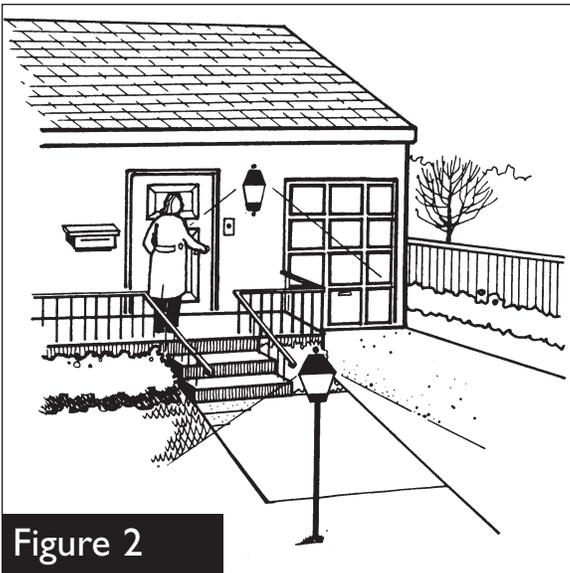
Figure 1

A ramp next to existing steps allows a person using a walker or a wheelchair to bypass the steps. Handrails guide and provide support for persons with poor vision, balance or mobility.

# Getting in and out of the home

(continued)

## I.2 Do you have any difficulty due to poor lighting along the walkway leading to your home?



**Figure 2**

Well-lighted walkways, steps and entrances, as well as colour contrasts, help people with poor vision to detect obstacles.

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install light fixtures or floodlights to illuminate entrances, steps and walkways
- Install easily accessible light switches or sensors to control outside lights
- Other (describe)

# Getting in and out of the home

(continued)

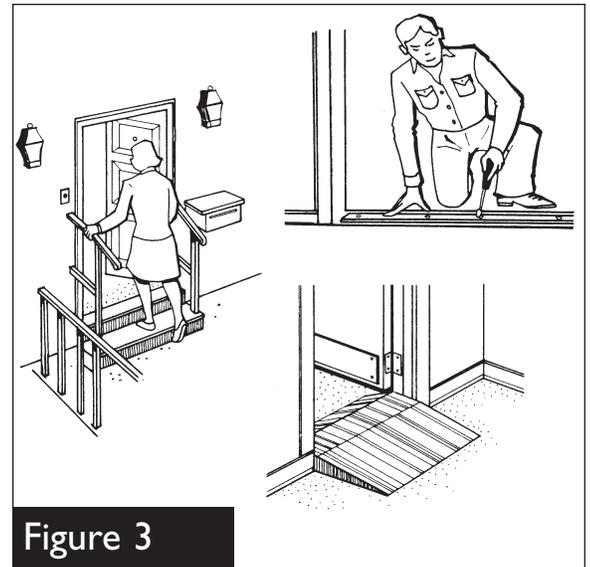
## I.3 Do you have any difficulty with outside doors?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Remove screen door
- Reduce height of door threshold and adjust or replace door as necessary
- Add a grab bar or handle near step or threshold (see Figure 3)
- Install a delayed-action door closer
- Replace locks to make operation easier or increase security
- Install lever-type door handles (see Figure 8 on page 6)
- Install small shelves inside and outside entrances at elbow height to hold parcels while opening doors
- Use colour contrast on door, door frame, handle or doorbell
- Other (describe)

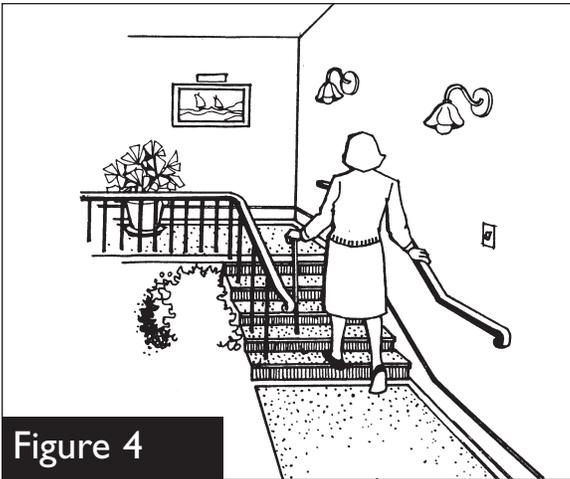


**Figure 3**

Low thresholds, small ramps or extra steps with a grab bar or handrails can be used at changes in floor levels in door openings.

# Using the stairs

## 2.1 Do you have any difficulty using the stairs inside your home?



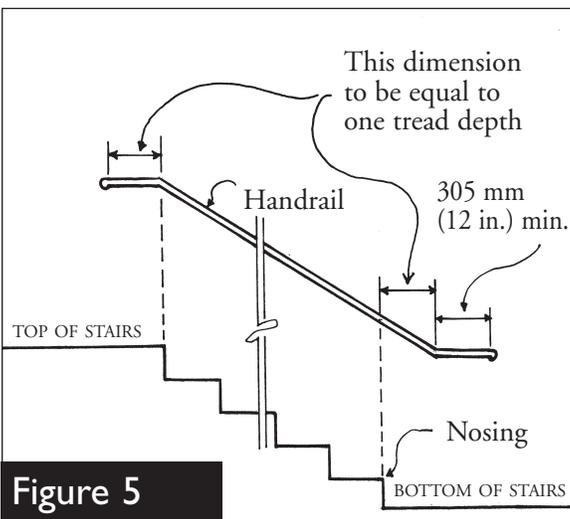
**Figure 4**

A well-lighted staircase with solid handrails on both sides and extending beyond the top and bottom of the stairs, together with visually prominent steps, is safer and easier for people with poor balance or vision.

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** ⚓ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Improve lighting in stairs
- Install two-way light switches at top and bottom of stairs
- Install or repair handrails (on both sides)
- Maintain a consistent handrail height above all nosings and above floor
- At the top of the stairs, extend handrail horizontally, the length of one tread, beginning directly above the last nosing (see Figure 5)
- At the bottom of the stairs, extend handrail the length of one tread beyond the first nosing. At this point, extend handrail horizontally at least 305 mm (12 in.)
- Replace worn stair coverings
- Mark stair nosings permanently (not with tape) if they are not distinctly visible. Note that a painted stripe can work well, and look good, on carpet
- Relocate bedroom to main floor level
- Relocate laundry room to main floor level
- Relocate or add a toilet on main floor or bedroom level
- Other (describe)



**Figure 5**

# Moving around your home

## 3.1 Do you have any difficulty moving from one room to another?

- No** ➤ If no, go to next question
- Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you  
 ▼
- Reduce height of, or eliminate, door thresholds at room entrances
  - Use colour contrast or changes in floor texture wherever there is a change in floor level (see Figure 6)
  - Install "swing-clear hinges" on doors to widen doorways
  - Install handrails or grab bars where there are significant changes in floor levels
  - Install handrails along corridor walls (see Figure 7)
  - Other (describe)

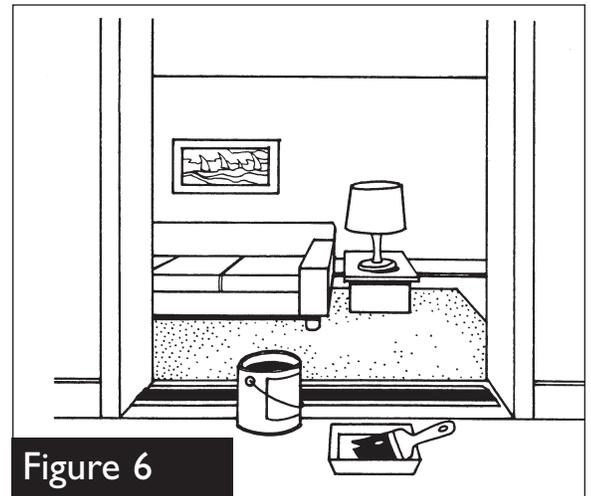


Figure 6

Strong colour contrast strips or changes in floor texture can help people with poor vision detect possible obstacles when moving between rooms.

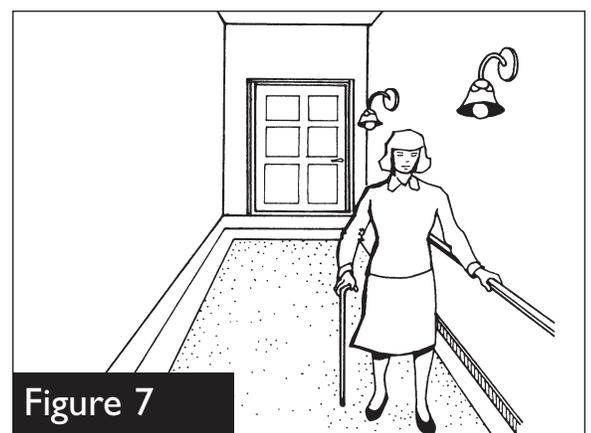


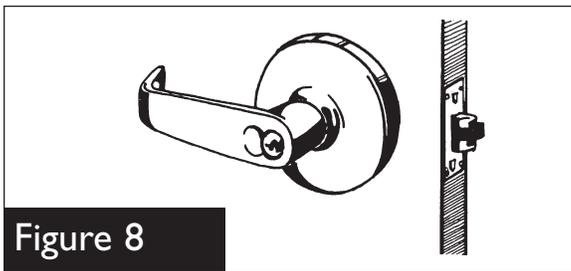
Figure 7

Handrails along corridors help people with poor balance or mobility.

# Moving around your home

(continued)

## 3.2 Do you have any difficulty with doors?



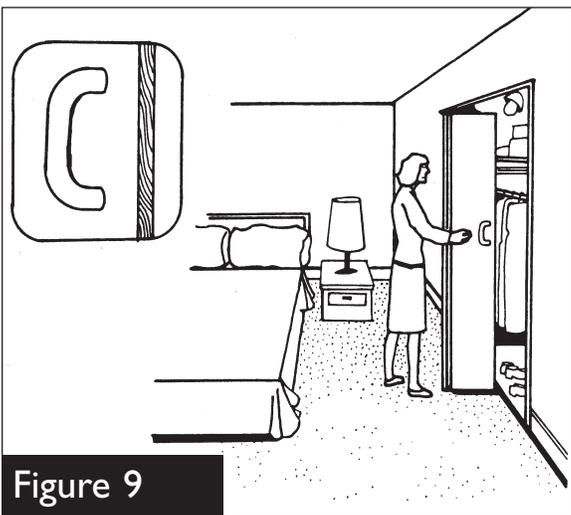
**Figure 8**

A lever handle is easier to operate for a person with a poor grip. A single-action deadbolt lock is secure and requires the use of only one hand.

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** ⚓ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Repair door frame or door hinges
- Reverse direction of door swing
- Replace door knobs with lever-type door handles (see Figure 8)
- Install sliding, bi-folding or accordion doors to closets and pantry
- Install "D" type handles or loop handles on bi-folding, sliding or accordion doors (see Figure 9)
- Other (describe)



**Figure 9**

A large "D" shaped handle can be pulled by people with decreased movement and strength in their hands.

# Using the kitchen

## 4.1 Do you have any difficulty working at the sink or using the faucets?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Adjust sink to a convenient height
- Create a knee-space under the sink to enable you to work from a seated position (insulate any hot-water pipes)
- Install lever-type faucets or a faucet with a single lever to control flow and temperature
- Relocate faucets for easier access
- Other (describe)

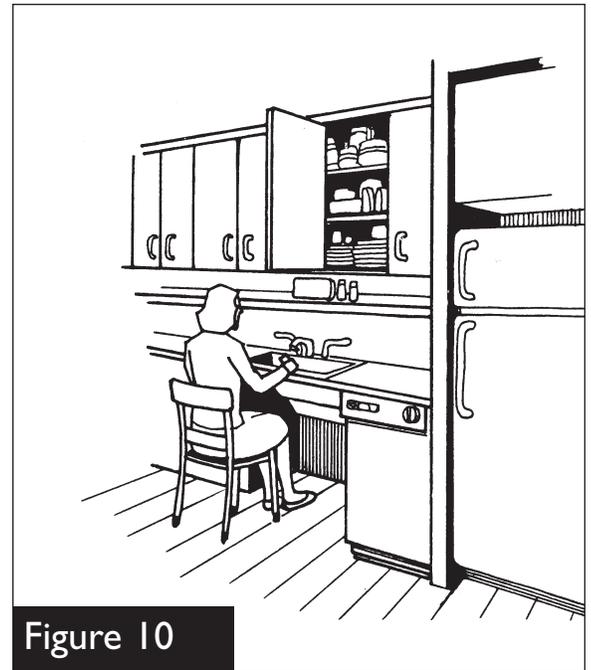


Figure 10

If you usually stand while using the sink, the sink should be at a height requiring minimal bending. If you wish to sit while using the sink, there should be knee space, and the sink and faucets should be positioned to require minimal stretching.

# Using the kitchen

(continued)

## 4.2 Do you have any difficulty working at the counter?

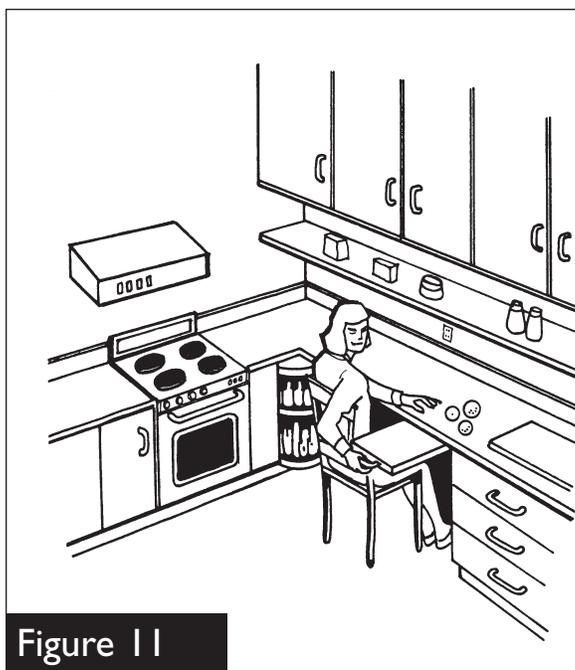


Figure 11

Pullout shelves enable you to carry out food preparation in a seated position. "U" or "L" shaped counters minimize walking distances between tasks.

No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Adjust counter height to a convenient working level
- Install additional counter or storage space
- Install pullout shelves under counter to enable you to work from a seated position (see Figure 11)
- Remove a cupboard to create knee space under counter for working in a seated position
- Other (describe)

# Using the kitchen

(continued)

## 4.3 Do you have any difficulty reaching or using cupboards or storage space?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Lower existing cupboards
- Lower shelves in cupboard
- Install pivoting or revolving shelves in corner cupboards
- Add cupboards or shelves at convenient heights
- Add a vertical cupboard or pantry
- Add pullout storage units under counter
- Install "D" type handles on cupboards or drawers
- Other (describe)

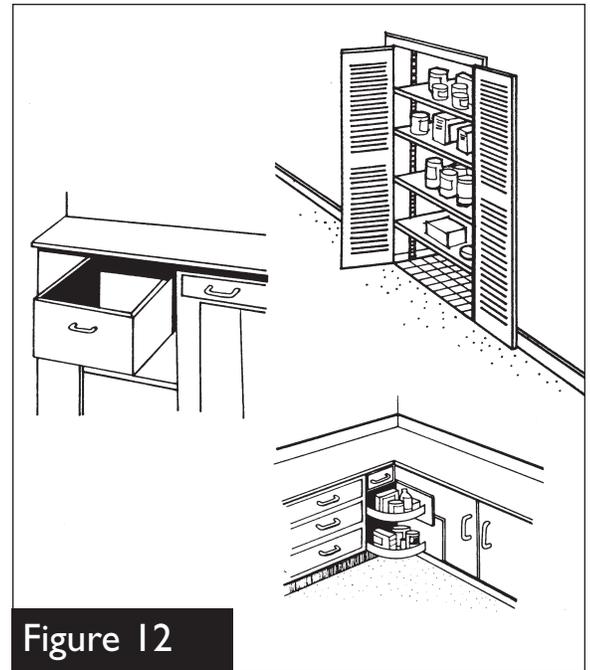


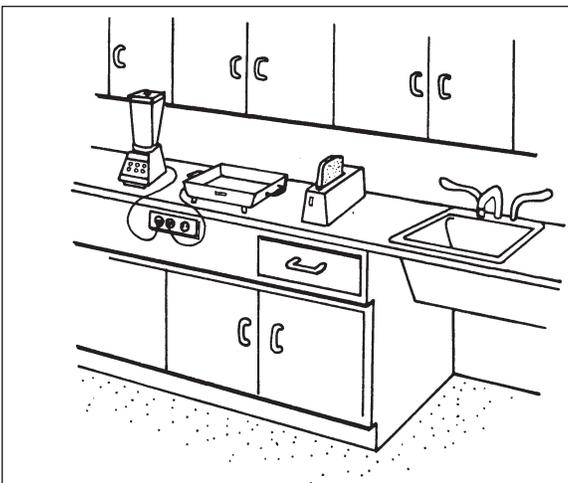
Figure 12

Pivoting or revolving shelves in corners, pullout storage units and large vertical cabinets make storage more accessible.

# Using the kitchen

(continued)

## 4.4 Do you have any difficulty using appliances?



No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Install additional shelves or countertop to accommodate small appliances
- Provide electrical outlets for small appliances in more convenient locations (see Figure 13)
- Provide heatproof, pullout shelf beside oven
- Install a heatproof surface on counter next to range or stove
- Install smoke and heat detectors outside, but close to, kitchen
- Install a fire extinguisher near kitchen exit
- Other (describe)

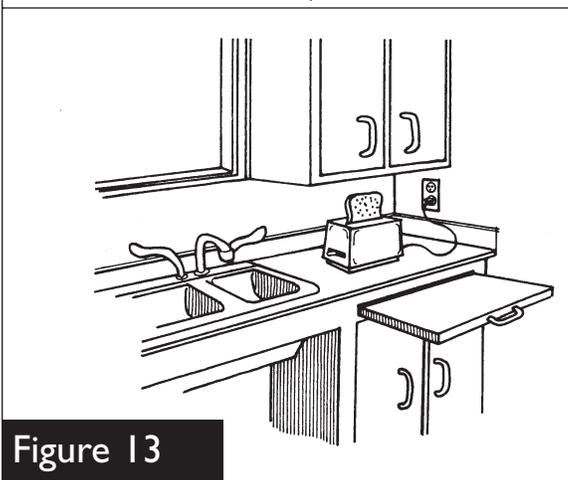


Figure 13

Install electrical outlets so that small kitchen appliances can be used in convenient locations without being moved.

# Using the bathroom

## 5.1 Do you have any difficulty using the wash basin or the faucets?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Adjust wash basin to a convenient height
- Create knee space under the basin to enable you to use it from a seated position (insulate any hot-water pipes)
- Strengthen basin with legs or solid cabinet that allows for proper knee space (see Figure 14)
- Install faucet with a single lever to control flow and temperature
- Relocate faucet to front or side for easier access
- Other (describe)

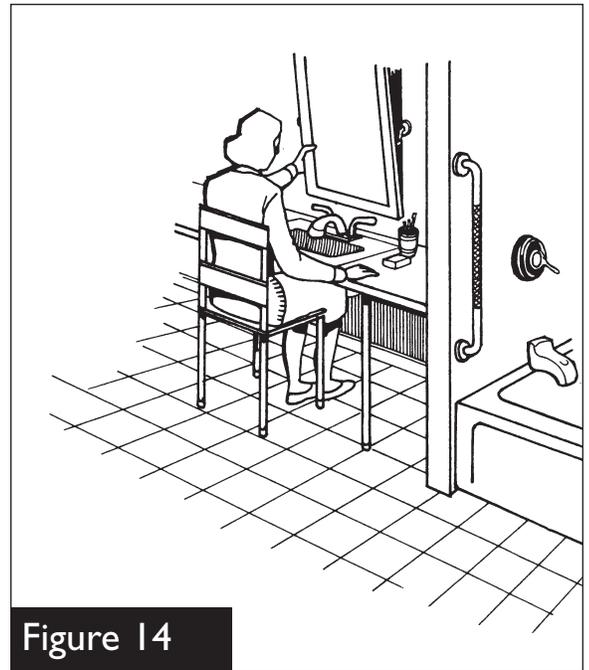


Figure 14

If you tend to lean, pull or push against the basin, it may need to be supported on legs or a solid cabinet. A cabinet can be designed to allow you to use the basin from a seated position.

# Using the bathroom

(continued)

## 5.2 Do you have any difficulty using or storing personal care items near the wash basin?



**Figure 15**

The mirror should be positioned at a convenient height, and tilted if necessary, so that it can be used from a standing or a sitting position. Grab bars by the sink can provide additional stability.

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install additional counter space around basin
- Install shelves beside basin for storage
- Install a grab bar within easy reach
- Install or reposition a mirror (tilted if necessary) at a convenient height (see Figure 15)
- Install additional light fixtures near mirror or medicine cabinet
- Other (describe)

# Using the bathroom

(continued)

## 5.3 Do you have any difficulty stepping into or out of the bathtub?

- No** ➤ If no, go to next question
- Yes** ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you
- Install a vertical and a horizontal or angled grab bar by the tub (see Figure 16)
  - Install non-slip flooring throughout the bathroom
  - Install a non-slip surface in the bathtub
  - Install a commercial or custom-made transfer bench so that the tub can be entered from a seated position
  - Replace bathtub with a shower stall or wheel-in shower, if difficulty is severe
  - Install a separate shower stall or wheel-in shower, if difficulty is severe
  - Other (describe)



**Figure 16**

A vertical grab bar provides support when entering the tub, while a horizontal (or angled) bar helps you to complete the entrance and lower yourself onto a shower seat or to the bottom of the tub. Grab bars should be installed to suit the needs of each particular user.

# Using the bathroom

(continued)

## 5.4 Do you have any difficulty using tub faucets, shower controls or drain plugs?



Figure 17

A mixing control with a single lever handle, for shower and bath, can be used by people who have difficulty grasping things.

No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Install lever-type faucets or a faucet with a single lever to control flow (see Figure 17)
- Adjust the hot-water heater or install a device that will prevent the water from reaching too high a temperature
- Install a drain plug device that can be operated from a convenient height
- Other (describe)

# Using the bathroom

(continued)

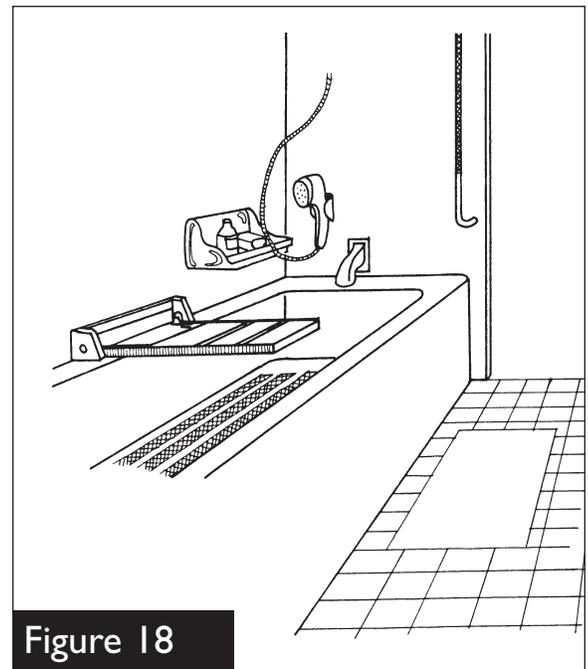
## 5.5 Do you have any difficulty taking a bath or a shower?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install a hand-held shower on adjustable rod or high-low mounting brackets (see Figure 18)
- Install a flip-up seat in tub or shower
- Install shelves within reach, for personal care items
- Install a grab bar within reach (see Figure 16 on page 13)
- Install a waterproof light fixture over tub or in shower stall
- Other (describe)



**Figure 18**

A hand-held shower, mounted on a vertical rod or on a low bracket, makes washing and rinsing easier when you use a seat.

# Using the bathroom

(continued)

## 5.6 Do you have any difficulty using the toilet?

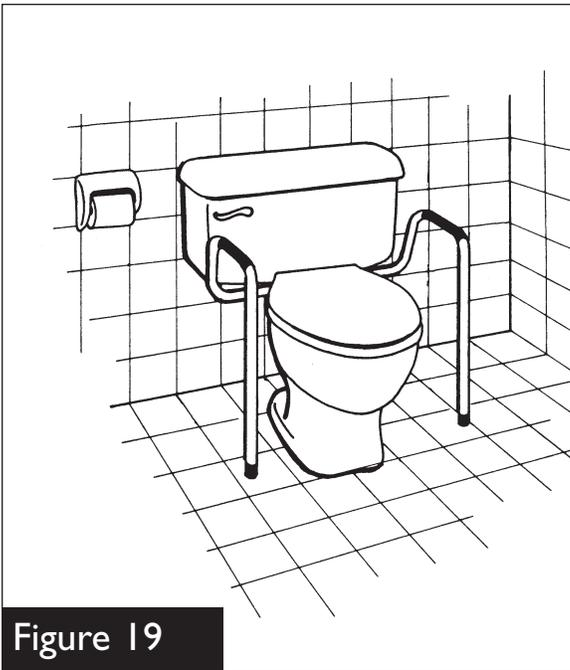


Figure 19

Grab bars can be attached to structural supports in a wall or directly to the toilet.

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Raise toilet seat to a convenient height by using a portable extension or setting the toilet on a pedestal
- Install fixed or fold-down grab bars (see Figure 19)
- Adapt flush handle or install activating sensor
- Adapt or relocate toilet paper dispenser
- Other (describe)

# Getting out of a bed or chair

## 6.1 Do you have any difficulty getting into and out of a bed, chair or sofa?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install a trapeze over the bed (see Figure 20)
- Install grab bars or vertical poles in convenient locations (see Figure 21)
- Other (describe)

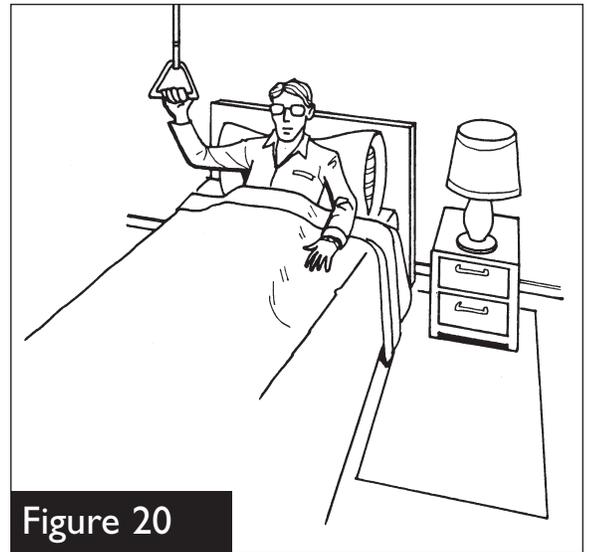


Figure 20

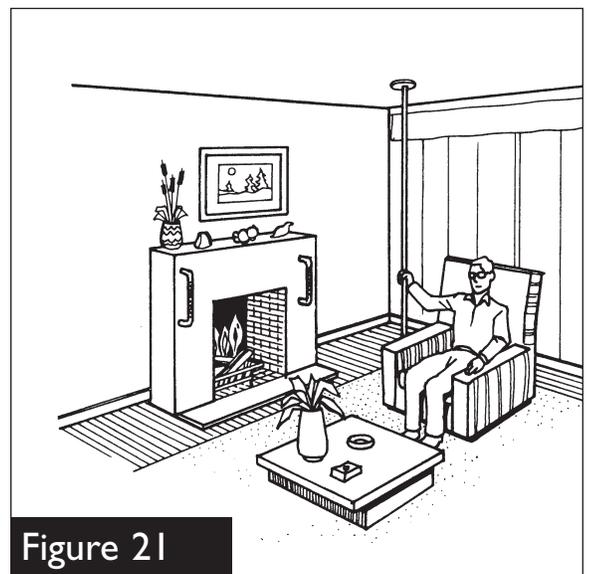
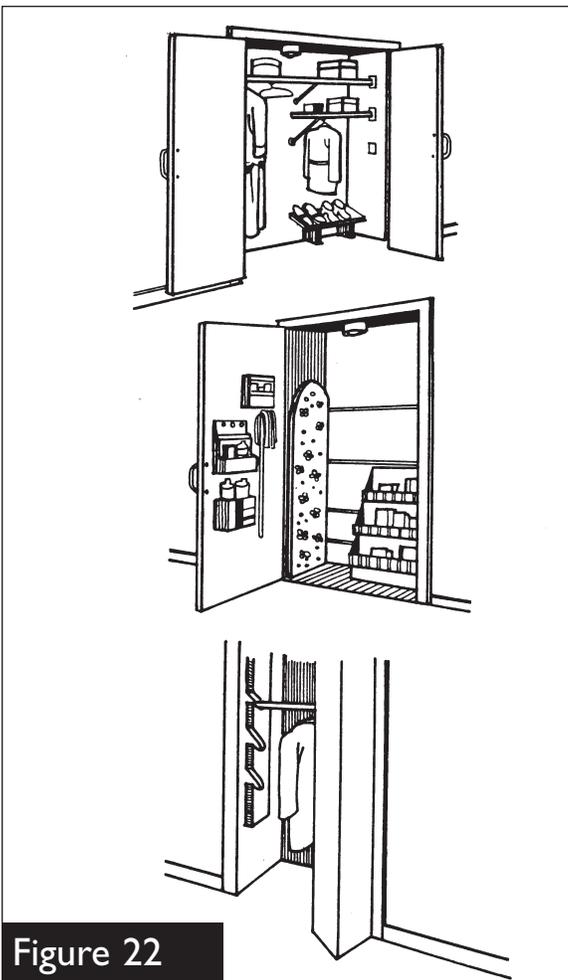


Figure 21

# Using closets and storage areas

## 7.1 Do you have any difficulty reaching clothes, coats, shoes or other items in closets?



No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Install bi-folding or accordion doors
- Install lights in closets
- Add or lower rods
- Add or lower shelves
- Add off-floor shelves in closets or at entrances for shoes and boots
- Install hooks or drawers in closets
- Build an easy-to-access storage closet for household tools and appliances (vacuum cleaner, ironing board, brushes, etc.)
- Other (describe)

Reachable shelves and rods in clothes closets and a well-designed utility closet for household tools and appliances help people who cannot reach very high or who have difficulty bending.

# Doing laundry

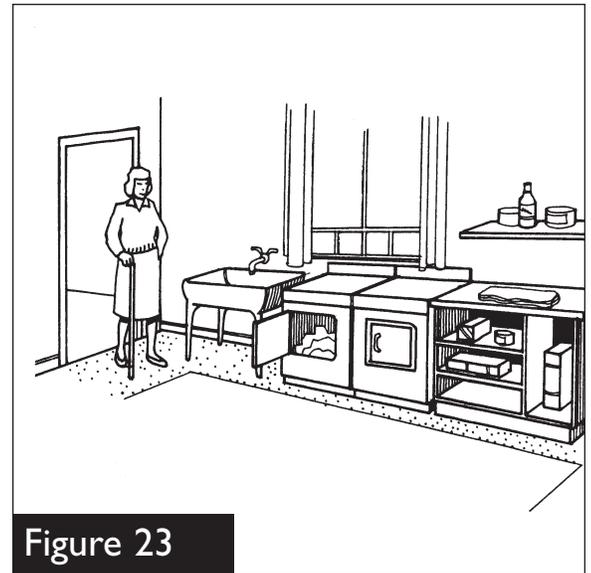
## 8.1 Do you have any difficulty doing the laundry?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Relocate appliances to a more convenient place
- Replace top-loading appliances with front-loading ones
- Provide shelves or storage near appliances so that washing supplies can be conveniently located
- Build a counter or large shelf near appliances for sorting and folding clothes
- Install an electrical outlet and an outside vent for a clothes dryer
- Adjust clothesline to a convenient height
- Install a conveniently located clothesline or rack
- Other (describe)



**Figure 23**

A countertop near the washer and dryer cuts down the number of times you have to move your laundry. A dryer could be useful for people who have difficulty using a clothesline.

# Using the telephone and answering the door

## 9.1 Do you have any difficulty getting to the telephone on time?

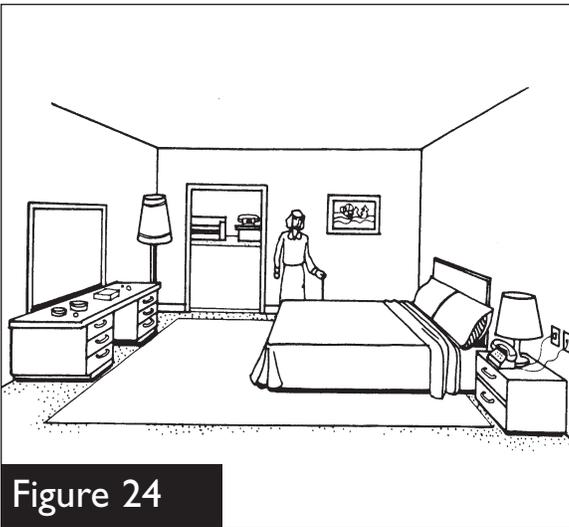


Figure 24

Installing phone jacks in several locations or using a portable phone can be helpful to people who cannot move quickly.

No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

Install phone jacks in convenient locations (near bed, sofa) and at a convenient height

Purchase a portable phone

Other (describe)

## SECTION 9

# Using the telephone and answering the door

(continued)

## 9.2 Do you have any difficulty identifying visitors or hearing the doorbell?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes** If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install a peephole or view panel at a convenient height
- Install an easy-to-use intercom in a convenient location
- Install a flashing light or other sensory cue to indicate when doorbell rings (see Figure 25)
- Other (describe)

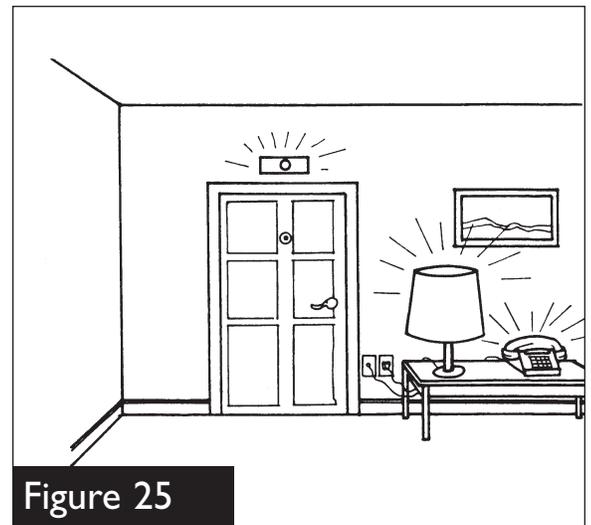


Figure 25

Devices such as a flashing light or sound amplifier to supplement the doorbell may help people with poor hearing or vision.

# Using the telephone and answering the door

(continued)

## 9.3 Do you have any difficulty reaching and emptying the mailbox?



Figure 26

A box or basket under a mail slot, and a hanging bag on the outside for newspapers, will reduce the need to bend down.

No ➤ If no, go to next question

Yes  
 ▼ If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Install the mailbox at a convenient height
- Install a mail slot with a box or basket on the inside to collect the mail
- Install a shelf near the mailbox to hold parcels
- Other (describe)

# Controlling light and ventilation

## 10.1 Do you have any difficulty due to poor lighting in areas of the home not mentioned previously?

**No** ➤ If no, go to next question

**Yes**      If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you



- Install light fixtures or electrical outlets for lamps where needed, for example, in hallways, in working areas, in pantry, near reading or activity areas (sofa, bed)
- Install light switches at convenient locations, for example, at room entrances, near bed and sofa, at both ends of corridors, at top and bottom of staircase
- Other (describe)

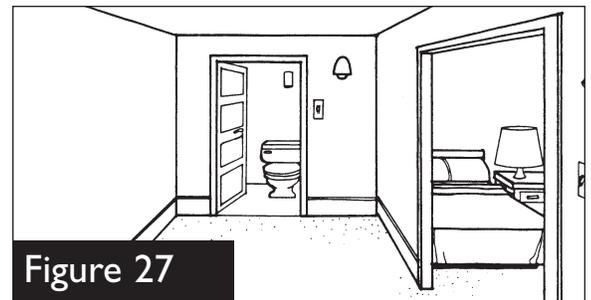


Figure 27

Light switches at doorways and two-way switches in corridors and stairways will minimize the need to move into dark rooms and areas.

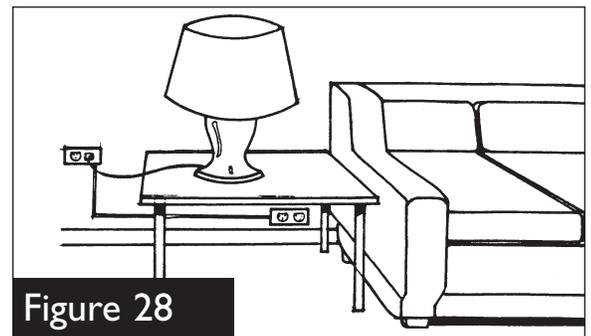


Figure 28

Additional electrical outlets can be conveniently located near reading and activity areas so that table lamps and appliances can be used without the need for long extension cords. The outlets should be positioned at a height that minimizes the need for bending.

# Controlling light and ventilation

(continued)

## 10.2 Do you have any difficulty with windows or sliding patio doors?

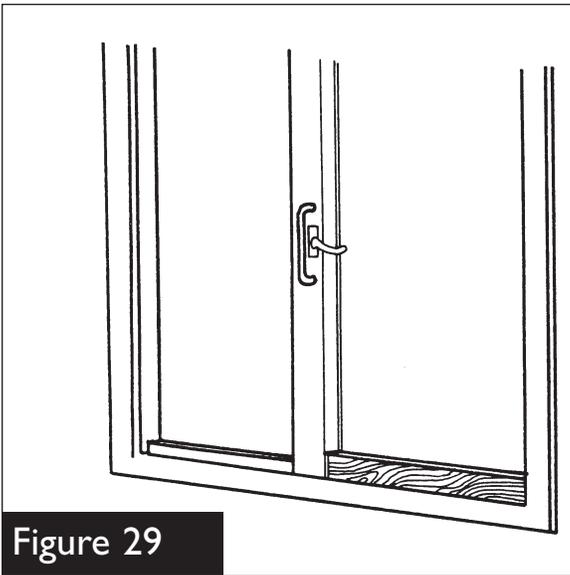


Figure 29

Large "D" type handles and extension arms on locks are easier to grip for people with decreased strength and movement in their hands. A locking bar placed between the frame and edge of a sliding door is effective in preventing forced entry.

No

Yes



If yes, check the adaptations below which would help you

- Install easy-to-grasp handles
- Install secure and easy-to-operate locks
- Repair windows and sliding doors so that they open and close easily
- Install security grilles at windows that are vulnerable to forced entry
- Install locking bars on windows or sliding doors that are vulnerable to forced entry
- Other (describe)

## ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

CMHC also offers programs\* that are designed to improve housing choice and conditions for low-income seniors and Canadians with disabilities.

### **Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence (HASI)**

This program helps homeowners and landlords pay for minor home adaptations to extend the time that low-income seniors can live in their own homes independently. Low income eligible seniors with age-related disabilities can obtain assistance in the form of a forgivable loan up to \$3,500 for minor adaptations that meet their needs.

### **Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program for Persons with Disabilities (RRAP-D)**

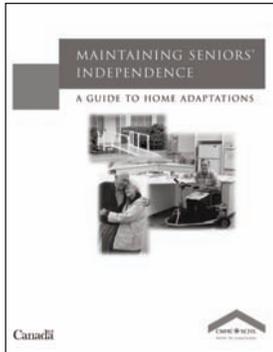
If your home requires extensive modifications, such as widening doorways and increasing space for wheelchair manoeuvring, you may qualify for financial assistance under this program. RRAP-D is intended for low-income homeowners and renters with disabilities.

\* In some parts of the country, funding for these or similar programs is provided jointly by the Government of Canada and provincial or territorial government. In these areas, the provincial or territorial housing agency may be responsible for delivery of these programs. Program variations may also exist in these jurisdictions.

**To find out more about these Government of Canada programs, call 1-800-668-2642 or visit CMHC's website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca)**

# MAINTAINING SENIORS' INDEPENDENCE THROUGH HOME ADAPTATIONS

## A Self-Assessment Guide

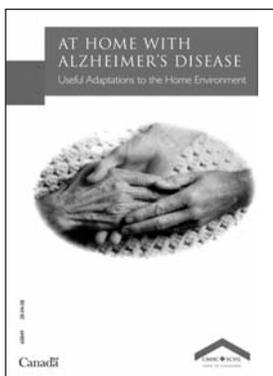


### Maintaining Seniors' Independence

#### A Guide to Home Adaptations

For many seniors, living independently at home is a much less costly and more welcome alternative to living in an institution. This checklist-style reference for seniors, their caregivers and support providers illustrates that in many cases, small and inexpensive modifications can be done to enhance independent living. A detailed questionnaire can be used to assess a senior's needs within the home.

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### At Home with Alzheimer's Disease

#### Useful Adaptations to the Home Environment

The safety and security of someone living at home with Alzheimer's Disease can be significantly improved by making minor, low-cost changes in a house or apartment. Topics include furnishings, the bathroom, the kitchen and overall safety and security. These practical adaptations will be of help to both Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.

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### About Your House

#### Fact sheets

*About Your House* fact sheets are intended to assist homeowners in taking appropriate measures to address existing problems in their house or to make informed decisions about changes or upgrades they may be planning. Relevant titles include *Hiring a Contractor*, *Sample Renovation Contract* and *Preventing Falls on Stairs*, as well as fact sheets from the *Accessible Housing by Design* and *How to Lock Out Crime: Home Security* series.

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