



For People with Disabilities

The kitchen is often the very center of our homes, a place where we gather to talk, cook and eat. That's why it is so important that the kitchen be accessible to individuals with a wide range of physical abilities. **The good news:** adapting your kitchen for maximum accessibility need not be prohibitively expensive or require top-to-bottom renovations. Here are some tips and design elements that can help make your kitchen a place for everyone.

- **Universal design** – If you're building a new home, consider incorporating elements of Universal Design. This approach to designing and building homes is based on the idea that spaces and products should accommodate people of all ages, heights and physical abilities. Universal Design isn't for anyone. It's for everyone.

For more information, contact the Center for Universal Design. (<http://ncsdesign.org/content>)

- **Room to move** – Another design tip: open kitchens or kitchens that are 'L' or 'U' shaped can most easily accommodate wheelchairs or walkers.
- **Extreme makeover** – Consider installing appliances that can easily be operated by individuals with a wide range of physical abilities: a built-in dishwasher with front controls; a front-loading washer and dryer; and a lowered wall oven, installed at a height of 30 to 42 inches off of the floor.

- **Easy to reach** – Most kitchen cabinets are placed 1 ½ feet above the countertop. Placing them closer to the counter makes them easier to reach. Easier still: add a free-standing storage cabinet.
- **Lots of light** – Make sure that your kitchen has sufficient lighting to eliminate safety risks.
- **Adding options** – Typical countertops are 3 feet above the floor. Adding a section that's lower, approximately 30 inches, gives you more workspace options and can accommodate a wider range of physical abilities.
- **A la carte** – Place commonly used items in a rolling cart with pull-out drawers. If the cart has drop-leaves, these can be raised for food preparation.
- **Side-by-side** – If you're in the market for a new refrigerator/freezer, consider a model with side-by-side doors that can be opened without having to reach overhead. In-door ice and drinking water dispensers help everyone, and save energy.
- **Hardware helpers** – Replace fixtures on cabinets or drawers with large easy-to-grasp "D" handles. (Hint: they're called "D" handles because they're shaped like the letter "D.")
- **Remote control** – While switches and outlets are often located high above the floor, remote control devices are available that can be used to operate them from any level or location within the home.

Additional Tips for People with Disabilities

- **Smoke alarms with flashing lights:** People who are deaf or hard of hearing should use alarms with strobe (flashing) lights that have been tested by an independent testing laboratory. The alarms for sleeping areas with strobe lights are required to be of a special high intensity that

can wake a sleeping person. Most major smoke alarm companies offer alarms with strobe lights. For information on availability and pricing, go to the manufacturers' Web sites. Manufacturers, distributors, and retailers of smoke alarms that meet U.L. standard 1971 for people who are deaf or hard of hearing include: **Ace Hardware Corporation, BRK Electronics, Gentex Corporation, Kidde Fire Safety, and Menards, Inc.**

- **Smoke alarms with 10- year batteries:** Alarms with a 10-year lithium batteries eliminate the problem of having to change batteries. The batteries are designed to last the life of an alarm. Ten-year battery alarms still need to be tested in accordance with manufacturers' instructions at least once a month.
- **Features that make testing the alarm easier:** Some alarms are equipped with large, easy to push test buttons. Alarms that can be tested by using a flashlight or television remote are particularly helpful for people with mobility disabilities, people who are blind or have low vision, or for older adults.
- **Avoiding nuisance alarms:** Alarms that go off because of burnt toast, steam, or other non-threatening sources can be a nuisance and can discourage people from using smoke alarms. Use alarms with a silencing feature that can be pressed to delay the alarm for a short period time. If the smoke does not clear in a certain amount of time, the alarm will sound again.
- **Installation and maintenance:** Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside each separate sleeping area. If you sleep with bedroom doors closed, have a qualified electrician install interconnected smoke alarms in each room so when one sounds, they all sound. Install a new battery in all conventional alarms at

least once a year. Test your alarm at least once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions.

- **Escape:** Include everyone in your home and make a home escape plan, making provisions for anyone who has a disability. Practice your plan at least twice a year.