

Make Your Home Work for You: Moving Around the House

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A home's features, fixtures and floor plans can pose challenges for stroke survivors. They often require moving long distances to accomplish routine tasks, and even short distances can require too much effort or risk. The three biggest challenges are floor coverings, passageway widths and changes in grade (level). But moving around and accessing all or most areas of your home can be easier or less risky with some simple changes, and most of them are low- or no-cost.

Floor coverings

Floor coverings are a problem when they require too much effort to walk or wheel over. Low-pile carpeting or vinyl or laminate flooring are good choices whether you walk (with or without a cane or walker) or use a wheelchair. They can replace thick or textured carpet (which create "drag") or hardwood floors (which require waxing and can be slippery). If you use a power wheelchair, consider removing all carpets, as the torque of making turns can stretch or damage carpeting.

Passageway widths

Passageway widths include spaces between furnishings, hallways and doorways. You can rearrange furniture to allow adequate space. You may have already done this to get to your favorite chair or the bed, but it's a good idea to evaluate each room for ways to gain adequate passage. This may require removing seldom-used furniture. Keep in mind that if you use a wheelchair or walker, any passageway that involves a turn must be wide enough to accommodate your equipment at the point where you change direction.

It's possible to get more space from a doorway without widening the door. The first step is to ensure that the door can swing open to at least 90 degrees, preferably to the adjacent wall. This may require moving objects behind the door. If a perpendicular wall or immovable furniture prevents full opening, consider reversing the hinges so that the door opens out (into a hallway) instead of into the room. If this is still not enough space (as for a wheelchair), you could install "swing clear hinges" to allow the door to operate normally but gain the few inches that are usually taken by the thickness of the door when it is opened. The last resort is to widen the doorway, which requires a remodeler or handyperson.

Grade changes

"Grade changes" refers to raised thresholds, steps or stairs. It can be helpful to have a rail or handle installed on the wall at places where you have to step up or over. On stairways, have railings installed on both sides of the stairs, extending just beyond the last step in either direction. This gives additional support for ascending and descending, including your approach to the stairs and as you step away. If you use a walker, consider getting a second one and keeping one upstairs and one downstairs rather than trying to bring it up or down the stairs.

You'll find that making small changes can make a big difference in reducing the effort and risk of doing daily activities in your home. [SC](#)