



Home Modifications:

Modify your bedroom to match your abilities

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The bedroom may pose challenges for individuals who have had a stroke. The most common challenges are: 1) entering/exiting and moving about in the room; 2) getting in and out of the bed; 3) access to closets and drawers; and 4) making the bed. Often these challenges can be resolved with low-cost or no-cost modifications.

Entering/exiting and moving about in the home

If the room is on a level you can access but getting into the room is a problem, consider these solutions:

SOLUTION/STRATEGY	SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS
Move items so that door opens fully	No cost
Reverse hinges so door opens out instead of in (if more space in hallway)	Requires handyperson skills and possibly new door trim
Replace hinges with "swing clear" style to obtain full width of doorway	Swing clear hinges (online vendors ~\$20 per pair)
Widen doorway	Requires carpenter or contractor
Move to a different bedroom with easier access and/or more space	Some upheaval, but saves effort and energy every day

Replace the doorknob with a lever handle so door unlatches with minimal effort.

If your closet is large enough, put shelves with bins in the closet and get rid of your dresser.

Once you can enter the room, assess the furniture layout. If you sleep alone, move the bed against a wall to open up floor space. Move furniture so you have the shortest clear path from door to bed and (if bathroom is connected to bedroom) to the bathroom from the bed.

Accessing storage

In general, closets are easier to access than drawers, particularly if you use a wheelchair. Installing a lightweight folding door reduces the space and effort needed to open the closet door. Open shelves or shelves with lightweight bins are easier to access than heavy or wide drawers in a dresser. If your closet is large enough, put the shelves with bins in the closet and get rid of the dresser. If you use a wheelchair or scooter, have a low hanger rod installed in the closet so you can easily hang or retrieve clothing (at about 42" off the floor). Even if you are standing, consider lowering rods to 48" off the floor for easier access. Install a battery-powered "touch light" in the closet for better lighting. Keep a reacher in the closet to access items stored on higher shelves or on the floor. Install a full-length mirror in the bedroom positioned so you can see your full reflection.

A final modification — for safety



One environmental solution is often overlooked — the phone. Keep a "corded" phone within reach at bedside. In the event of a power outage or an extreme weather event, cordless phones and Internet phones will not work. If your new bedroom layout requires moving the phone, have a new jack installed or additional cord (kept away from your pathways) so that you still have a phone within reach while you are in bed. A cellphone in the charger (and fully charged) is a good second option to have nearby. The charger will not work in the event of a power outage, but the phone will be charged and ready.

Getting in and out of bed

Difficulty getting in and out of bed or moving between lying down and sitting up can be a tiresome daily challenge. Sleeping on the other side of the bed may make it easier to move between lying down to sitting.

Why is this? It's usually easier to go from lying down to sitting up by rolling onto one's affected side and then pushing up with your stronger arm in front of you and, if necessary, using the stronger leg to push the weaker leg off the bed. So lying with the affected side on the "outside" of the bed can be easier. The side people sleep on is usually dictated by habit, and many are surprised to discover that changing this habit can change or eliminate the level of assistance needed to get out of bed.

If it is still a challenge, consider these strategies:

PROBLEM	SOLUTION/ STRATEGY	SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS
Bed too high	Purchase flatter mattress/ boxspring AND/ OR remove casters AND/OR have legs of bed cut shorter	Depends on support needs, value of bed and material (wood, metal)
Bed too low	Place bed risers/ elevators under each leg of bed (raises bed 3 to 5 inches depending on style)	Sold in sets of 4 at housewares stores and some mass merchandisers: under \$20
Hard to control getting up/down	Handle support (various names: bed cane, bed assist, bed handle)	Available from various Internet vendors. Attach to bed frame or stabilizer that slides under mattress

Once you have the bed how you need it, arrange the furniture so that your nightstand is nearby but the approach to the bed is clear.

Making the bed

Layers make more work to make the bed or change linens, and also make it more cumbersome to pull covers out of the way to get in bed and to cover or uncover yourself. Consider a European solution: replace blankets and bedspreads with a comforter in a duvet. A duvet is a

Consider a European alternative to layered bedding: replace blankets and bedspreads with a comforter in a duvet.



cover that the comforter fits into, usually with button or velcro fasteners; visualize two sheets sewn together on three sides that just fit the comforter.

A comforter with duvet can be used with no other covers or top sheet, just a bottom sheet, and only the duvet has to be washed regularly. Making the bed involves just one layer, the comforter (inside the duvet). Some survivors may still need assistance to change the duvet, but even someone using a wheelchair and one hand can usually make a bed with a comforter inside a duvet. Making the bed is as simple as tossing the comforter over the bed and then the pillows. Launder the duvet as needed.

Most bedroom access challenges can be solved with creativity and little cost. If you are not sure about what would work for you, consider consulting an occupational therapist who offers home modifications consultations. A consultation will assess your needs, preferences and abilities as well as the existing features in your bedroom. The occupational therapist will consider how your stroke has affected your abilities as well as any other health conditions to identify modifications that will fit you now and in the future. If you share the bedroom with a spouse or partner, the occupational therapist will also consider the needs and preferences of that person to identify solutions that fit you both and make your home work for you. **SC**

About the author...

Carol Siebert, M.S., OTR/L, FAOTA, is an occupational therapist with specialty expertise in home modifications. She is the owner of **The Home Remedy**, a practice she established in 1997 to provide consultation and services to assist individuals to be independent in their homes. She resides in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF STROKE:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

If you experience some or all of these warning signs, don't wait. Call 9-1-1 right away.