



## HELPING YOUR LOVED ONE BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT

# Ways to Make the Home Safer (Home Modification)

After a stroke, your loved one may fall or have trouble moving around. You can make changes to improve home safety. These types of changes are called “home modification.”

### What Do You Need to Know?

Some changes are easy and you can do them yourself. For bigger changes, you may need professional help. The changes you make depend on the needs of your loved one.

### What Can You Do?

Look around and find ways to make your home safe. Watch your loved one walk in the home to find areas that are unsafe.

#### **Bathroom**

- Buy non-slip bath mats, tub or shower benches and toilet chairs.
- Install handrails beside the toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Install a hand-held shower head so your loved one can sit during a shower.

#### **Kitchen**

- Buy a stove with controls in the front. Your loved one will be able to reach the controls when cooking.
- Lower counters to make them easier to reach while sitting.
- Keep oven mitts and heat-proof mats close to the stove. Leave areas near the stove clear to place hot dishes.
- Place a fire extinguisher in easy reach.

#### **Bedroom**

- Put bedrails on the bed for safety.
- Place a commode beside the bed so your loved one won't need to walk to the bathroom. This can prevent falls at night.

## What Changes Can Be Made for Stroke Survivors Who Use Wheelchairs?

Remove the cabinet under the stove or sink so your loved one can roll under. Use heat-proof covering (insulation) on pipes in roll-under sinks and stoves to prevent burns.

Stroke survivors may have trouble moving wheelchairs on heavy carpet. Use non-slip flooring if you remove the carpet. Widen doorways to help stroke survivors get in and out of the home. Outdoor and indoor ramps can also be built.

## What Are Some General Home Changes?

**Place pads on soft furniture to help with toileting accidents** – Cover the pads so that other people will not notice.

**Remove throw rugs** – Use double-sided tape to hold down carpets.

**Keep floors clear** – Place large furniture far apart to help your loved one move around. Make sure furniture does not move if leaned on. Cover sharp corners of furniture.

**Place handrails on both sides of stairs for safety** – Elevators or lifts for the home can help stroke survivors who cannot climb stairs.

**Replace door knobs and faucet knobs with lever handles** – This will help stroke survivors who have trouble using their hands and arms.

## What Are Some Other Safety Changes?

- Place a phone in each room or give your loved one a cell phone to call for help. Large-button phones are helpful for people who have trouble seeing.
- A medical alert system that the stroke survivor can carry may help.
- Lighting should be bright (use high wattage light bulbs) to prevent falls. Install overhead lights or nightlights in doorways, hallways and bathrooms.
- Install and regularly check smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Move all cords out of the way. Make sure cords are in good repair to prevent shock or fires.

## Helpful Tips

- If possible, have your loved one visit the home before the last day in the hospital. Some hospitals and rehabilitation centers will let patients take weekend trips to visit family. This will help you learn how to make the house safe before your loved one comes home.
- Occupational therapists, visiting nurses and physical therapists can come to your house and help you make changes.
- Purchase items for home safety at medical equipment stores and through catalogs.

## How Can You Pay for Home Modification?

### Insurance and Medicaid

Some changes to the home may be covered by insurance. Talk to private insurance companies to see what can be covered. Medicaid may pay for some needed medical items.

### Government Funding

The VA has some funding through its Home Loans program, <http://www.homeloans.va.gov>. Contact other government resources, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Social Security Administration to help with funding. You may also get information from Eldercare Locator. The "More Resources" section at the end of this fact sheet has more information. Talk to the social worker at your hospital to find out more about all of these programs.

### Private Funding

Non-profit and volunteer groups may pay for some home changes. Contact groups like Rebuilding Together and NeighborWorks Network. You can find their contact information in the "More Resources" section at the end of this fact sheet.

## Remember

- The needs of your loved one should determine the changes you make. The healthcare team can help you make the right changes.
- Home changes are often easy to make and you do not need a lot of money. Talk to a social worker if money is a problem. There are ways to obtain help in paying for home changes.
- Look around and keep checking your home for ways to make it safe.

## More Resources

The following resources contain internet links. The location of internet pages can change. Therefore the links provided may not always work. For the most current version of this list, go to <http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue/resources>. This page will be updated frequently.

**Link Disclaimer:** Links to information and Web sites outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs do not indicate an endorsement of products or services offered by the sites. In addition, these sites may have privacy and security policies that are inconsistent with those of VA.

### **Department of Housing and Urban Development**

Web: <http://www.hud.gov>

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development may help with funding for home modification projects. To find your local Housing and Urban Development office go to this link: <http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/localoffices>

### **Department of Veterans Affairs**

Web: <http://www.va.gov>

The VA has some funding for home modification projects through its Home Loans program. Go to this link: <http://www.homeloans.va.gov>

The VA Health Benefits Service Center provides information on VA benefits for assistive technology. Go to this link: <http://www.va.gov/health>

### **Eldercare Locator, Area Agency on Aging (AAA)**

Web: <http://www.eldercare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-677-1116

The Eldercare locator helps you find your local Area Agency on Aging. They also have a fact sheet on alternative transportation options for your loved one. Go to this link: [http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/fact\\_sheets/pdfs/Trans\\_Options\\_Panels.pdf](http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/fact_sheets/pdfs/Trans_Options_Panels.pdf)

### **Internet Stroke Center**

Web: <http://www.strokecenter.org>

Phone: 1-314-362-3868

The Internet Stroke Center has tips on changes that may need to be made to the home after a stroke. Go to this link:

<http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/ot/index.htm>

### **Medicaid**

Web: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicaid.asp>

Medicaid is a program that provides health coverage for lower income and disabled people. Benefits will vary by state. Benefits may include assistive devices, such as wheelchairs and scooters. Certain medical criteria must be met.

### **Medicare**

Web: <http://www.medicare.gov>

Phone: 1-800-633-4227

Medicare is a program that provides health coverage for people age 65 or older.

### **My HealthVet**

Web: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet has information on VA services, strokes and caregiving.

Also visit the Caregiver Assistance Center on the My HealthVet Web site. This section provides more information on caregiving.

- Go to: <http://www.myhealth.va.gov>
- Click on the button that says “Enter Here”
- Click on “Research Health” on the top bar, then “Healthy Living Centers”
- Click on “Caregiver Assistance”

### **National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification**

Web: <http://www.homemods.org>

Phone: 1-213-740-1364

The National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification has a large list of companies with products to make daily living easier. You can find this list by going to the following link:

<http://www.homemods.org/resources/products.shtml>

For more information on stroke caregiving, visit the RESCUE home page:

<http://www.rorc.research.va.gov/rescue>

## NeighborWorks Network

Web: <http://www.nw.org>

Phone: 1-202-220-2300

The NeighborWorks Network and other non-profit and volunteer groups may pay for some home changes. Use the “Neighbor Works Lookup” tool on their Web site to find a local group.

## Rebuilding Together

Web: <http://www.rebuildingtogether.org>

Phone: 1-800-473-4229

Rebuilding Together and other non-profit and volunteer groups may pay for some home changes. Find your local group by clicking on “Find an Affiliate.”

## Social Security Administration

Web: <http://www.ssa.gov>

The Social Security Administration may help with funding. Click on “Find a Social Security Office” to find a location near you.

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**References:** Sabata, D., Butler, L. (2007). *Adapting the home after a stroke*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from, The Internet Stroke Center: <http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/ot/index.htm>; Pereira, H.K. (2006). *Home safety checklist*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from, Strength for Caring: <http://www.strengthforcaring.com/daily-care/home-safety-modifications-home-safety/home-safety-checklist/>; La Grow, S.J., Robertson, M.C., Campbell, A.J., Clarke, G.A., & Kerse, N.M. (2006). Reducing hazard related falls in people 75 years and older with significant visual impairment: how did a successful program work?. *Injury Prevention*. 12, 296-301.



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