

# How to future-proof retirement living



Downsizing to a home that no longer needs to accommodate a large family is something that people often do at a stage in their life when they are still healthy, fit and active.

They may be thinking about releasing capital, improving lifestyle, and reducing maintenance responsibilities, but the young retired may give little thought to finding a property that will meet their needs as they grow older.

John Lavin of Cognatum says, "The costs of moving have become so high that astute property owners go to lengths to keep the number of lifetime moves to a minimum. Buying a property in early retirement that will be suitable for decades makes sense.

"Downsizers at this stage of life should choose wisely, ensuring that latter life homes can be adapted to suit different stages of ageing. Bear the following criteria in mind when choosing a property that you'd like to see you through your twilight years:

"Off street parking with level access to the front door should be non-negotiable.

"Single storey living is ideal for later life, but if an apartment with lift access, or a bungalow isn't your style, make sure that the ergonomics can be adapted. Narrow

windy staircases will be tricky, look for wide straight stairs with space for a handrail, or a stair lift, or a layout that allows for installation of a lift.

"Seek out property whose ground floor rooms are all on one level – even single steps from room to room can be awkward. And flat access from parking to front door, and from house to garden is ideal. Look for flat gardens on a single level.

"A wide hallway that can accommodate a bigger than usual front door will make life easier if walking sticks, wheelchairs, or other walking aids are required.

"Flexible space will keep all your options open, so look for a layout that will allow you to knock the space into open plan living which is easier in later life, and / or rooms that can serve multiple purposes, maybe a downstairs bedroom. Bedroom space for a carer can facilitate remaining at home rather than moving into a care home.

"An open plan kitchen, or one that's easily accessible from the rest of the house will

make life easiest. A spacious kitchen will mean that you can keep everything you need constant access to within easy reach and install eye-level utilities.

"A large bathroom will make life much easier, either en suite, or as close as possible to the bedroom. You're aiming for enough space to accommodate a separate bath and large shower, open access is ideal, and space to install grab rails in relevant spots.

## Cognatum's tips for making a home more age-friendly:

Stairs and changes in level are hazardous:

- Install handrails on stairs and where there are changes in level
- Carpet stairs to make grip easier

Pay attention to lighting:

- Install an automatic light sensor at the front door
- Put a run of lights on one switch, so, for instance, a switch at the bottom of the stairs lights the way to the bedroom; or one inside the front door lights the hall and living area.
- Wire bedside lights in to avoid too much clutter on bedside tables, and position the switch within easy reach.
- Raise power sockets to waist height.

Install an emergency call system



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## Decrease the chances of slipping:

- Lay flooring that gives an even, non-slip surface. Rugs on tiles or polished wood can be particularly hazardous.
- Install grab rails and non-slip flooring in the bathroom.

## Avoid scalding:

- Install thermostatic mixing valves on taps in the shower and bath. A hand-held shower head is particularly helpful too, either in addition to a fixed rose, or in its place.

## Getting in and out of bed can become difficult:

- Replace a bed that's too low or too high with one that's just right – so you can swing your legs onto the floor while sitting, and stand up easily.

## Don't store things out of reach:

- Bedroom wardrobes and other storage should be well organised, and customised if necessary, with a range of pull-out drawers, and hanging that's easy to reach.

## Make al fresco easy:

Replace high maintenance planting with low-maintenance, build in enough hard surfaces and paths to allow you easy access around the garden, and add raised flower beds to minimise bending and kneeling.

Lavin says, *"If property buyers choose wisely in the 60s and 70s, minor amendments to the property can be made as and when required, with little in the way of drama and upset, making the property suitable and safe for years to come."*

Cognatum has 60 retirement estates in 21 counties across central and southern England, a total of 1500 retirement homes. All are in prime locations within vibrant market towns or villages, within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Each estate benefits from thoughtful architecture, landscaped grounds, and a dedicated estate manager.



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