

How to make a home more age-friendly

The costs of moving have become so high that property owners are increasingly adapting their existing property to make it more suitable to different stages of ageing. John Lavin of Cognatum Property suggests ways in which existing properties can be adapted to make them safer and more user-friendly for later stages of life.

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

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 alfresco 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.

John Lavin says, "If property buyers choose wisely in their 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."

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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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Editor's Notes: Case studies of retirement home residents can often be found. Contact Amanda MacCaw in the first instance.