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Aging in place. Simple modifications you can do to make your elderly parents more comfortable in their home.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau nearly 40% of adults age 65 and older have at least one disability. At least two thirds of those adults report having problems with walking and climbing. Many of the challenges that our parents are having with independent living can be eased or solved entirely with simple modifications you can do yourself or with the help of a building contractor.

My wife and I are going through the above experience with both of our parents, two of them struggling with disabilities. The changes we have made to make their lives more comfortable are fairly inexpensive and easy to do. I am not talking about changing their homes to meet stringent ADA guidelines. Neither of our parents needs that at this point, and those types of modifications can be costly.

The first place we attacked was the entry doors and steps. We added lever locksets to the doors, a 20-minute project. Secondly we added small ramps with railings besides the steps. If the door is fairly level with the ground or deck even a small ramp up to the door stoop can make a big difference for someone who has a hard time picking up his or her feet.

Next was the bathroom. For elderly adults, the bathroom is more than 80% of older adults experience a fall. The first thing we did was to install a higher toilet. You can buy them for under \$200 at a local lumberyard. We installed arms on both sides. Or you can install grab bars on the walls if the walls are close enough. The portable arms are a good start. We also widened the doorway so a walker could easily get through. Bathtubs are a large concern due to injuries, so we removed the tub and installed a shower. This project was a little more involved and required a plumber. But the shower will fit right in the space that the tub occupied so no structural changes are needed. You can add accessories like grab bars and seats to the shower as needed. Showers come in one, three, or five-piece units so that you can get them into almost any existing home.

Lighting is very important also. A 60 year old requires three times the amount of light to see as well as a 20 year old. The most important areas are the bathroom and stairs. So brighten those light bulbs or add lights as needed. We have changed many of the lights over to the LED flush mount lights. They are available at Home Depot and Lowes for \$35 each. They can even go in the shower. These lights are very bright and are dimmable. It's a better choice to "over light" a space and provide dimmers for making adjustments than to under light it.

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Over all, even if you had to hire a contractor to do the more difficult changes above the total cost should still be under several thousand dollars. Both of these homes are single-storey ranches, which make the changes very easy.

I also have a client with a beautiful two-storey cape style home. The simple solution there was to convert the den into their master bedroom. Along with the above changes they now have a first floor master suite and no stairs to climb.

And don't forget energy efficiency. Both of our parents' homes are 1960s ranch style houses with virtually no insulation in the attic! It took some convincing, but we installed up-to-date insulation and ventilation. Several of my elderly relatives asked us do the same to their homes. Also both homes now have heat pumps installed. These run about \$2700, but reduce the heat bill by 40%. Efficiency Maine has some good rebates to help with the cost. Cutting the energy costs will help your parents stay in their home longer.

So even just a few of the more simple changes I talked about will help your parents be more comfortable and safe in their home. And hopefully help you feel a little less worried!

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