

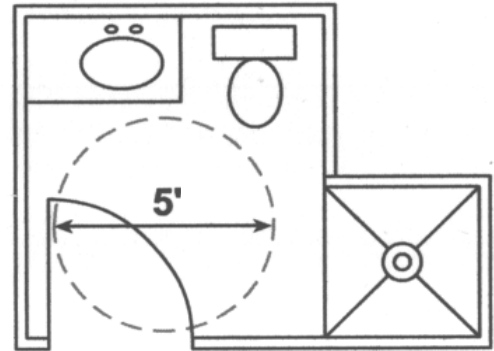
Universal Design for Better Living

The Essential Bathroom



Full-sized bathroom on main level

An easy-living home requires a full-sized bathroom on the main level. Family members will appreciate the extra space and guests of all ages and abilities will feel more welcome. At a minimum, you'll need a five-foot circle of open floor space for maneuvering a wheelchair between bathroom fixtures. A small powder room won't work for guests who use walkers or wheelchairs. A shower stall—with no curb to step over—is more convenient than a tub for most guests. Make sure the doorway opening for the bathroom is at least 32 inches wide (preferably 36 inches). Universal design features, such as these, make homes better for everyone.



The Extras

Other universal design features add convenience and comfort.

- Large mirror, extending down to counter top
- Non-glare lighting on top and sides of mirror
- Electrical outlets at counter height with ground fault circuit interrupters
- Pedestal sink or removable front on sink cabinet. Provide continuous floor covering underneath cabinet
- Single-lever faucets with anti-scald controls
- Hand-held shower head on adjustable slide arm
- Reinforced walls (under drywall) next to toilet, tub, and shower so grab bars can be added if needed
- Higher toilet with elongated seat
- Non-slip flooring
- Lever handles on bathroom doors
- U-shaped handles on cabinet drawers

Possible future changes

By including universal design features in the bathroom, you won't be forced to move or do major remodeling if the health or abilities of family members change. The extra floor space in the bathroom is the key to future usability. Most adjustments will be minor. Here are some changes that may be needed to accommodate a disability:

- Install grab bars to replace towel bars. They come in a variety of colors to coordinate with bathroom décor and must be anchored securely into the studs.
- Remove front of base cabinet to provide clearance under sink for easy wheelchair access. Insulate exposed pipes to prevent burns on legs of seated users.
- Obtain an electronic toilet seat lifter that makes it easier for caregivers to assist someone getting on and off the toilet.
- Install sensor lights that come on automatically when someone enters the room.

Problems with an existing bathroom

If you're already stuck with a problem bathroom, here are some options to make bathing easier and safer. Most require remodeling changes.

- Purchase a bath bench with legs that straddle the side of the tub. The bench makes it easier to transfer in and out. Once seated inside the tub, use a hand-held shower for bathing.
- Install a "transfer seating area" at the end of an existing bathtub.
- Replace an existing bathtub with a soft bathtub to provide some cushioning if falls occur.
- Install a transfer shower (36" x 36") with built-in, adjustable, or removable seat. Select a curbless unit that is recessed into the floor and slopes gently to drain near back wall.
- Replace an existing bathtub with a shower unit in the same space (36" x 60"). Be sure the shower unit is recessed into the floor and has no curb or lip.
- Install a roll-in shower (60" x 60"). The extra space allows a wheelchair user to roll into the shower in a waterproof chair.

For more information

If you plan to build or remodel your bathroom:

- Connect to the Iowa State University Extension Web Site on "Universal Design & Home Accessibility"
www.extension.iastate.edu/universaldesign
- Visit the "Universal Design Learning Laboratory" on the Iowa State University campus to try out bathrooms with universal design features. Call 515-294-6568 to schedule an appointment.

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