

Home Accessibility

Kitchens

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Universal Design Living Laboratory (www.udll.com)

Universal design allows independence, safety, control and quality of life at home and in the community today and in the future.

Universal design is the concept of designing products, services and environments to be used by all people, regardless of age, size, ability or circumstance. Universal design helps make homes and communities accessible and extends a person's ability to age in place (living in one's own home for as long as confidently and comfortably possible). Universal design allows independence, safety, control and quality of life at home and in the community today and in the future.

Accessibility and Safety

The kitchen may be the heart of the home for many families, but without an accessible kitchen, meal preparation can be challenging and even dangerous. A kitchen that incorporates universal design recognizes that individuals differ in age, size, and ability and allows for individuals and families to adapt to changing needs, both short and long term. Projects to make a kitchen more accessible range from grand complete kitchen remodels to weekend do-it-yourself projects. The following universal design features can make your kitchen a safer and more user-friendly space.

Doorways

- 36-inch-wide door

Lighting

- Well-lit (artificial and natural)
- Task lighting over sink, stove and other work areas

Flooring

- Water- and slip-resistant flooring in light color
- Flooring that is easy to maintain (avoid floor wax)

Floor plan/space

- Clear open space 5 feet in diameter
- Aisles 42 to 48 inches wide
- Extra electrical outlets for appliances
- Kitchen island that does not hinder work flow, large enough to be useful

Sink and faucets

- Single-lever faucet or ergonomic dual handle, high arc with spray head that pulls-out
- Anti-scald valve

Countertops and cabinets

- Easy-access kitchen storage (pull-out shelves, adjustable-height cupboards, lazy Susan turntable)
- Multi-level countertops with open space beneath so a person can work while seated
- Pull-out countertops
- Rounded countertop corners
- Easy to open cabinet doors and drawers
- Single lever or u-shaped handles on cabinet doors

- Glass doors on upper cabinets for content visibility
- Heat resistant surface counter-top near oven for safe transfer of hot items
- L- or u-shaped counter with sink, cook-top and oven (for moving heavy or hot items safely)

Appliances

- Appliance controls easy to read, reach and operate
- Flat cook-top (if younger children are not in home consider control knobs in front or on the side for easy access)
- Wall-mounted, self-cleaning convection oven with interior light and oven lock-out switch (installed at height so that center of control panel is approximately 48 inches from floor and center shelf is level with adjacent countertop)
- Microwave 24 to 48 inches above the floor with audio and visual signals
- Side-by-side refrigerator with extra freezer space and water/ice in the door
- Dishwasher unit elevated a minimum of 6 to 9 inches from floor
- Lock-out devices
- Exhaust fan control switch located at front of counter or where accessible for easy reach when seated

Miscellaneous

- Fire extinguisher near exit (15 to 48 inches above the floor, away from all cooking equipment)
- Contrasting colors for the walls, floor and counters
- Rolling cart that can be easily moved for food preparation, serving and cleanup
- Sturdy step stool with non-slip steps and grip handrails

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology includes universally designed products and equipment modified or customized to increase, maintain or improve functional ability. A wide variety of assistive technology is available today, ranging from special computers to writing utensils. Adaptive kitchen accessories are designed to allow people with physical disabilities more independence in cooking and eating, which leads to a greater sense of self-sufficiency, which can carry over into other areas of life.

Many states and local communities offer programs and services that help people with disabilities obtain and pay for assistive technology. Medical professionals, including physicians and physical and occupational therapists, can help you get connected to assistive technology that is right for you.

Evaluation

In all residential situations, assess your needs and determine which modifications and assistive technologies are most appropriate for you. Use the accessibility checklist above to help you evaluate new accommodations or to determine what updates will improve your kitchen space.

Related Extension Publications

Home Accessibility: Assistive Technology (FCS4-413)

Home Accessibility: Aging in Place (FCS4-414)

Home Accessibility: Bedrooms (FCS4-415)

Home Accessibility: Bathrooms (FCS4-416)

Home Accessibility: Resources (FCS4-418)

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