

Independence at Home

Richard Hardine

Living with a disability and dealing with new lifestyle changes can be challenging. These changes can affect your self-image, vision of success and overall well-being. If you find yourself relying more and more on caregivers, it might be a good time to investigate making changes around your home.

Understanding and accepting your diagnosis and prognosis is key to maintaining a comfortable, healthy and happy lifestyle. The changes to your home can be simple or quite involved.

A medical team composed of experienced physicians, physiatrists, physical and/or occupational therapists will be key in helping you develop a plan for living independently. In addition, an architect, experienced building contractor and electrician can offer guidance in making successful changes and adaptations within your home. Your age, level of disability, physical attributes and current living conditions will factor into the plan.

The first step will be to determine your current and anticipated physical abilities, living conditions, outside assistance in your daily routine, and activities of daily living.

The second step consists of a comprehensive site visit by your care providers. This will help identify what should be modified to simplify your everyday functions, increase your independence, and maintain a safe environment. Measurements should be taken of door widths, toilet heights, access to kitchen equipment, safe transfer to tub, bed and chair. Location of equipment such as your hot water heater, furnace and electrical panel should be reviewed, to name just a few. Medicines, self-care and emergency phone numbers should be listed as well.

Ideally, all your daily activities should be covered so you can function and live as safely and independently as possible. Strength and endurance need to be considered, not only currently but what you anticipate it may be in the future. The care team should explain the mechanical devices and other work that should be considered for your independence and safety.

There are sample pages from two surveys on the following pages (6 and 7). I designed these to help individuals with disabilities assess their living environment. The Residential Accessibility Survey is designed and used to assess the accessibility of your home. A sample from the 10-page survey is on page 6.

The Client Survey focuses on physical activities. A sample is on page 7.

The surveys can be used together or separately. Please contact PHI (314-534-0475, info@post-polio.org) for a copy of the complete surveys. ■

continued on page 6

Richard Hardine is the author of *Lessons Learned: My Lifelong Journey with Polio*. His articles include “Universal Design,” “Housing Design Breaks Down Barriers” and “Planning to Build Your Retirement Home Using Universal Design.”

SAMPLE OF THE RESIDENTIAL ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY

INSIDE DOORS AND CORRIDORS	ARE THE DOORWAYS AND HALLWAYS WIDE ENOUGH TO MOVE THROUGH?	G YES	G NO
	IS THE HALL WIDE ENOUGH TO TURN A WHEELCHAIR AROUND?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THE THRESHOLDS FLUSH? IF NOT, DOES THIS PRESENT A PROBLEM?	G YES G YES	G NO G NO
	DO THE DOORS AVOID OPENING INTO THE HALLWAY OR OTHER SPACES WHERE THEY MAY BE A BARRIER?	G YES	G NO
	IF A WHEELCHAIR OR OTHER WALKING AID IS USED, ARE THE WALLS, CORNERS, DOORS, PROTECTED FROM SCRAPING?	G YES	G NO
	PROBLEMS:		
	SOLUTIONS:		
STEPS AND STAIR CASES	ARE THE STAIRS IN THE HOME EASY TO CLIMB?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THEY IN GOOD CONDITION?	G YES	G NO
	DO THEY ALLOW FOR GOOD FOOTING?	G YES	G NO
	IS THERE CARPET OR OTHER TYPES OF COVER ON THE STEPS?	G YES	G NO
	IS IT SECURE AND FASTENED?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THERE ANY SHARP EDGES ON THE STEPS?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THERE HAND RAILINGS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STEPS AND ARE THEY SECURELY MOUNTED?	G YES	G NO
	IS THERE ADEQUATE SPACE TO MOVE FREELY UP AND DOWN THE STAIRS?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THE STAIRS WELL LIGHTED?	G YES	G NO
	IF THE STEPS ARE TOO STEEP OR DIFFICULT TO USE, IS THERE A STAIR LIFT?	G YES	G NO
	ARE THERE ANY SUNKEN OR RAISED ROOMS IN THE HOME?	G YES	G NO
	PROBLEMS:		
	SOLUTIONS:		
KITCHEN	IS THERE ADEQUATE SPACE TO MOVE AROUND IN THE KITCHEN? (MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR WHEELCHAIR IS 5 FOOT RADIUS.)	G YES	G NO
	IS THERE ADEQUATE LIGHTING IN THE WORK AREA FOR COOKING, CLEANING, AND FOOD PREPARATION?	G YES	G NO
	IS THE KITCHEN VENTILATED?	G YES	G NO

SAMPLE OF THE CLIENT SURVEY

BATHROOM

1. Sink/Lavatory Area

Any access concerns? _____ Sink? _____

Height/depth of the sink/lave comfortable for you? _____

Present height _____ Preferred height _____

What height range is best for storage? _____

Is there a need for open space below the sink and vanity? _____

Does the present faucet operate easily for you? _____

Comments _____

2. Bathtub/Shower Area

Do you prefer a bath? _____ Shower? _____

Is your bathtub easy to use? _____

Is there a tub/shower seat? _____ Is there a need? _____

Is there a hand-held spray? _____

Can the controls be reached from both a sitting and standing position? _____

Are the controls easy to use? _____

Present type and location _____ Preferred type and location _____

Is the bathtub/shower floor non-slip? _____

How will you approach/transfer to the bathtub/shower? _____

Comments/Concerns _____
