

Tips for Home Design

Making your home easier and more pleasant to live in.

If you care for someone with Parkinson's you may have noticed that these days a number of what were once "small things" about their living space may have taken on a new importance for them. This may affect your caring relationship with them considerably; what you do for them, and how you do it.

It's not unlikely they have to do things slower than they used because they have less control over their own movement. Therefore whereas indoor/outdoor flow and the times of day their house catches the sun may have once been paramount, maybe these days, mundane factors such as the ease of opening drawers and cupboards suddenly matter much more.

Maybe it's been obvious, or maybe it's crept up on you both. But things have changed and will continue in that direction.

Or it may be that your partner is newly diagnosed and you're wondering about the future. Totally understandably.

Whatever the case you are very far from alone and there's a lot of help, advice and support available. You may not be aware of the thinking that has gone into even the smallest detail of making houses more "Parkinson's friendly." You might, too, even be pleasantly surprised at what help is available from Government agencies, including financial assistance, to help you make their home easier and more pleasant for them to live in, into a sometimes uncertain future. Visit the following websites to find out more:

- www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/disability-services/types-disability-support/equipment-and-modifications-disabled-people/housing-modifications-disabled-people;
- www.accessable.co.nz;
- www.disabilityfunding.co.nz.

Intelligent preparation for the future is vital and you may know about or have heard about universal design. It's a concept which a lot of people find useful to reimagine their current living space or make the best choices surrounding anywhere new to buy or rent, or even have built.

As far as its application to Parkinson's, ultimately universal design is having a whole dwelling designed to plan for all contingencies so that you can age in place, or stay in your own home as long as you can. However, that's at one end of the spectrum: there are a number of smaller actions you can take to make your home more Parkinson's friendly.

In New Zealand the universal design movement is represented by Lifemark, a seal of approval for residential buildings. You can find out how future proof your current home is on the Lifemark NZ home score page at www.lifemark.co.nz.

If you're thinking of designing your home, you may wonder what a Lifemark design standard home looks like. If you're concerned

Tracey's Tips

Parkinson's carer Tracey Gilmour, who lives in Taumaraunui, Waikato, has some tips on universal design.

Tracey recommends:

- Rails near steps.
- Chair or steps to sit on at door to put shoes on.
- Open plan living is always good.
- Sliding internal doors are good because they take up less space and you don't have to step back to open them.
- No clutter lying around the house.
- Rugs attached to the floor so they don't move.
- Rails in shower and by the toilet.

that a design which emphasises safety and accessibility can make your home look unappealing and institutional, you'll be surprised to find creativity, safety and access can go hand in hand. You can visit the BRANZ website to see some universal design homes at www.branz.co.nz.

(BRANZ describes itself, on its website, as "an independent and impartial research, testing and consulting organisation inspiring the building and construction industry to provide better buildings for New Zealanders.")

SMALL, BUT VERY HELPFUL STEPS

Universal design doesn't need to involve expensive home improvements. It can be as simple as installing grab bars for balance, lever door knobs and step-free showers. These changes can help us remain in our homes for longer, and be more healthy and independent.

LIFELONG DESIGN CHECKLIST

Here are some ideas:

EXTERIOR PATHWAYS

- Slip resistant path.
- If using paving stones consider the distance between for easy step length.
- Consider raised garden beds.
- Minimise the change in gradient to enter your home—if not possible provide handrails. When a step less entrance is not possible, ensure your entries have stairs that provide a uniform rise and tread within each flight. Consider use of a higher tread depth.
- Where possible avoid uneven floors and pathways, to reduce the risk of falls.
- Make sure your main entry is protected from the weather.

GARAGES AND DRIVEWAYS

- You want a parking space that is wide enough for everyone getting in and out of cars and for possible loads.
- If possible, ensure vehicle access routes allow a vehicle to be driven on and off the site rather than having to be reversed on or off it.
- Ensure there is direct, adequately lit and possibly covered access from the garage to the house.
- Install lights with two-way, motion or heat sensors between the home and where vehicles are parked.
- Wide and clear door openings—810 to 910mm.
- Lever-style door handles.
- Light switches at a consistent height throughout and within easy reach—similar height to door handles.
- Light switches at all entrances to rooms so there is no need to walk in the dark.
- Power points at a consistent height—preferably waist height and away from corners.
- Good lighting in all rooms.
- Windows that open, preferably with hinges at the top.
- Consider window placement for ease of access especially for those that open.
- Have a good fire escape route.
- Clear space to ensure access around sides of beds.
- Put light switches or lamps by beds and ensure you have easy-to-operate switches that don't require too much strength to use.
- You might want a bedroom and a bathroom on the main living level.

BATHROOM

- Strengthen walls to accommodate future handrails and shower seat.
- Lever handle taps and hand held shower rose on a slide rail.
- Select a floor surface that is slip resistant and easy to clean
- Make sure the edges of cupboards, doors and benches are rounded
- Make sure all bathroom glazing is made of safety (or toughened glass)
- Ensure the bathroom has good natural ventilation and consider installing an extractor fan or other form of mechanical ventilation.
- Avoid stairs between a bedroom and the closest toilet.
- Avoid the risk of burns by positioning the shower mixer so the water temperature can be adjusted before the user enters the shower.
- Consider installing a level entry shower.
- Work out if it's possible to remove glass and replace with shower curtain at a later stage.
- Avoid locating a heated towel rail where it may be used as a grab rail.

KITCHENS

- Position the kitchen so that it's possible to see indoor and outdoor play areas.
- Design your house so people don't walk through the kitchen to other parts of the house.
- If possible, design the kitchen so it can be temporarily fenced off (ideally with a stair gate) from young children.
- Plan appliance heights to reduce bending.
- Make sure appliances are easily accessible and positioned away from corners.
- Choose appliances with easy to use knobs, handles and controls – preferably near the front of the appliance.
- Allow for a space next to oven, and microwave to place hot dishes on.
- Frequently use items should be located on bench tops or stored between hip and shoulder height.
- Heavy pots and pans are best kept near your stove and sink and on a shelf which is easy to pick them up from.
- Consider drawers instead of cupboards.
- Choose slip resistant flooring.
- Avoid sharp edges on benches, cabinets and handles.
- Keep the distance hot food must be carried between the kitchen and dining area to a minimum.
- Make the floor between the kitchen and the dining area level to reduce trips
- Ensure your kitchen has a permanent means of ventilation at the cooking source to remove the heat, smoke and steam that occur during cooking
- Ideally install low level night lights turned on by motion sensors.
- Make sure doors don't open into hallways.

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