A bath can be a renewing experience. Consider a senior with limited mobility and strength; getting in and out of the bathtub can cause an injury or fall. Falls can lead to serious problems.

Seniors should be able to bathe safely, but how do you create safe access to bathtubs? Options to improve bathtub safety include installing grab bars, rubber floor mats, or a bathtub seat. Let's learn about modifications and alterations to make bathtubs more accessible to seniors.

Understanding bathroom safety for seniors

Aging adults with mobility limitations, weakness, or balance issues are at a higher risk for falls. For example, the inability to stand on one leg and lift the other leg high enough to clear a step or barrier can cause a fall. Statistics show that seniors are more likely to fall inside the home, with **about 23% of those in the bathroom, possibly due to environmental issues like slippery surfaces.**

Besides environmental barriers, other causes of falls include vision issues, medications, and incontinence - hurrying to the bathroom.

Falls are common for older adults; according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 37% result in injuries requiring medical care or restricted movement for at least one day. Serious injuries

can occur from falling, such as broken bones and spinal or head injuries. Repercussions of falls could include possible surgery or intensive medical care, followed by rehabilitation in a skilled nursing facility, home healthcare, or outpatient physical therapy.

A single fall can have devastating long-term effects or even result in death. Taking proactive measures for fall prevention is essential to a senior's health, longevity, and quality of life. Addressing a simple precaution such as removing floor rugs that are not non-slip can decrease the incidence of a fall and its potential health damage as well as assist in maintaining senior independence.

Making your existing bathtub more accessible

Some aging adults choose to move to senior communities for their accessibility accommodations. Seniors who want to continue living in their homes, known as aging in place, could benefit from updating their bathrooms. There are several options to improve accessibility and safety in the bathroom without a major renovation:

- Grab bars
- Bath seats
- Non-slip mats
- Handheld showerheads
- Bathtub rail

Some of these extras may require handyperson skills, others just a shopping excursion for accessories or equipment.

A guide on bathtub modifications for improved accessibility

Health and safety professionals recommend modifications to improve bathtub accessibility and safety. Installing these recommendations may provide optimal accessibility and safety, limiting injuries or falls when bathing.

Grab bars

Grab bars are essential additions to improve bathtub safety for elderly people. Grab bars are attached with hardware to the side and back tub walls. Installing bathtub grab bars for seniors may require some handyperson skills.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides specific requirements for proper placement and installation parameters for secure support. These instructions refer to a bathtub with a seat:

> 1. At the foot of the tub, the grab bar shall be 24 inches (610 mm) minimum in length measured from the outer edge of the tub.
> 2. On the back wall, two grab bars are required. The grab bars mounted on the back (long) wall shall be a

> minimum 24 inches (610 mm) in length located 12 inches (305 mm) maximum from the foot of the tub and 24 inches (610 mm) maximum from the head of the tub.
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> 3. One grab bar on the back wall shall be located 9 inches (230 mm) above the rim of the tub.
> 4. The other shall be 33 to 36 inches (840 mm to 915 mm) above the bathroom floor.
> 5. At the head of the tub, the grab bar shall be a minimum of 12 inches (305 mm) in length measured from the outer edge of the tub

Bath seats

Bath seats are also called bathtub chairs or benches. They support seated bathing which may be especially helpful for seniors with balance problems. Different types are available depending on your tub space and personal needs.

- Bath seats can rest inside the tub on support legs or extend outside the tub
- Bath seats may have a backrest for support or without like a bench
- Fixed or swivel seats
- Some extend across the tub without legs

Non-slip mats

Bathrooms are full of slippery surfaces; therefore, it's important to add items that improve stability especially when getting in and out of the tub. Non-slip mats for bathtubs for seniors can decrease their risk of slipping and causing an injury. These mats are comprised of mixed materials with textured surfaces for better agility and are meant to adhere to the floor limiting the chance of sliding. Place a non-slip mat inside and one outside the tub for optimal safety.

Handheld showerheads

Handheld showerheads can typically be attached to existing faucets or can be added with minimal effort. They offer greater control and flexibility during showers, especially for those using a bathtub seat. Adding a handheld showerhead for elderly people improves their ability to remain independent during bathing.

Bathtub rail

Bathtub rails for seniors are additional items to improve safety and support while entering and exiting the tub. This equipment is installed on the tub edge or nearby and often it uses clamps that can be tightened to fit the area without invasive hardware. There are a variety of styles to fit your existing bathtub and specific support needs.

Additional considerations for

bathtub modifications

We've established five standard options for bathtub modifications, but let's discuss some other factors to consider when deciding what works best for you.

- Modifying or upgrading faucet handles may make them easier for seniors with arthritis.
- Using a long-handled sponge or loofah improves reach ability for independent bathing.
- Most bathtub seats are adjustable to a certain point. Make sure you measure your tub height and width to choose the correct tub seat size. However, despite having a bathtub seat an elderly person with limited mobility may still be unable to bathe unassisted.
- Bathtubs with doors may need to be deconstructed to allow for a tub seat to be installed and used safely. Removing doors and adding a curtain is likely the best option.
- Some modifications will require professional installation, therefore seniors need to consider the cost involved with the modification and the handyperson doing the work.

Alternative solutions for seniors: walk-in tubs and showers

Seniors may want to remodel the bathroom to improve accessibility instead of using bathtub

modifications. A couple of solutions available include adding walk-in tubs and showers. These options are more expensive and require professional installation in most cases.

Walk-in bathtub

A walk-in bathtub improves accessibility for seniors who want to take a bath with reduced fear of falling. It's a home investment for aging adults choosing to age in place. Benefits of walk-in tubs include minimal step-in clearance, already built-in grab bars and seats, and upgrading to hydrotherapy jets which may prove therapeutic benefits for achy bodies..

Walk-in bathtubs can accommodate seniors with mobility or balance issues because they're easier to get into and out. They promote increased bathing safety since have slip-resistant floors and subsequently promote independence.

Walk-in shower stalls

Another alternative for seniors who prefer showers is to replace the bathtub with a walk-in shower with a bench. Conversely, an existing shower that's not accessible, can be modified to a walk-in. Walk-in showers provide an easier entrance and exit since you don't have to step over a threshold. They can have an incorporated seat or allow for a removable tub seat to be used.

Cost considerations

The price range for bathtub modifications or accessories starts as low as $25 and increases depending on how many items you require to improve accessibility. The starting cost of walk-in bathtubs is about $2,000 but can go up to $12,000 depending on the amount of work needed in the bathroom and the chosen product.

Typically, Medicare and Medicaid will not cover the cost of walk-in bathtubs or showers since they do not consider them medically necessary. Medicare Advantage plans may provide benefits for certain modifications but that is based on the individual plan. Making bath accommodations may seem challenging, but financial assistance for bathroom accessibility is available.

The National Council on Aging (NCOA), along with several other aging agencies and professionals, has developed a model to provide modification services. The Home Modification Information Network is a government-supported initiative that promotes aging in place by offering programs and assistance to aging adults in need of home safety and access solutions.

The Administration for Community Living provides an information database for seniors and caregivers to assist with planning accessibility modifications. The *Eldercare Locator* is a resource used to determine what services and assistance are available.

Safety tips for seniors using bathtubs

Even with improved access and modifications to decrease fall risks, accidents can occur. Precautions and alternate bath routines can make a difference. If you are wondering how to make the bathtub safer for seniors, we can provide several tips.

1. Always have someone nearby in case of assistance.
2. Maintain a consistent water temperature to avoid scalding.
3. Use bath wipes or washcloths for bathing if necessary.
4. Ensure there's adequate lighting and bath items are within reach.

Finally, when you must decide between installing a walk-in tub vs a bathtub conversion for seniors, safety and accessibility are the primary focus. Determine the type of modification necessary to improve bathtub accessibility and safety for an aging adult to maintain independence at home. Physicians can order a home safety evaluation, usually performed by an occupational therapist, that will recommend changes to improve accessibility and reduce fall risks. Remember, the ultimate goal for many seniors is maintaining a high quality of life while aging in place.

FAQ

How can you make an existing bathtub more senior-friendly?

Installing bathtub modifications such as grab bars, bathtub seats, non-slip mats, handheld showerheads, and bathtub rails improves bath accessibility and safety for seniors. These options don’t require major bathroom remodeling or renovation.

What can you do to make bathing more accessible for seniors?

You can modify an existing bathtub by adding accessories and tools such as a tub seat and rail, grab bars, handheld showerheads, and non-slip mats. Additionally, you can renovate a shower stall to make it a walk-in or add a walk-in bathtub.

Why is bathtub accessibility important for seniors?

Improving bathing accessibility with bathtub modifications or adding a walk-in bathtub or shower can reduce senior fall risks. Serious injuries requiring medical treatment can result from falls in the bathroom. Reducing fall risks improves seniors' ability to maintain their independence.

Key takeaways:

Bathtub modifications to improve accessibility and safety can increase

senior independence and support aging in place.

Installing grab bars, bathtub seats, non-slip mats, handheld showerheads, and bathtub rails increases accessibility and safety for aging adults.

Walk-in bathtubs and showers provide a safe but more costly option for senior bathing accessibility and safety.

Accessibility planning and financial assistance for bathtub modifications are available through various agencies.

Seniors must always consider their safety and use precautions despite the modifications because accidental falls and injuries can still occur.

Resources:

1. Falls and Fractures in Older Adults: Causes and Prevention.
2. Common Injuries as We Age.
3. A Descriptive Analysis of Location of Older Adult Falls That Resulted in Emergency Department Visits in the United States, 2015.
4. Home Modification Information Network.

5. Home Modification Resources.