

Who Will Change My Light Bulbs?

Preparing yourself for the next stage of life often begins with determining where and how you'll be spending it



Joseph F. Coughlin, PhD, Director of the MIT AgeLab

One of the main questions facing Americans today concerns housing needs as we get older. Specifically, it's about the decision as to whether or not we'll be able to stay in our current residence and community as the years go on. According to a University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, 88% of adults age 50–80 surveyed intend to stay in their own homes as long as possible.¹ Often, the memories associated with our house and being comfortable in that familiar environment are the leading factors in wanting to stay put.

But here's the reality: Even if you're determined to age in place, work needs to be done.

A Home for a Lifetime

How will you continue living in your home safely and independently? When we're younger, most of us take for granted our ability to do daily house cleaning, maintenance, and basic repairs—even home modifications. Forward-thinkers understand our homes as they appear today are most likely not ones that can sustain us into the future.

Incorporating universal design principles—a framework used to create a more functional living environment—into our modifications can greatly increase accessibility. These changes include widening hallways, creating single-floor living spaces, and adding safety modifications to accommodate medical equipment, walkers, and wheelchairs.

Work to Be Done

A 2022 survey found 58% of boomers remodeled their homes, likely a sign that they were planning on staying and not moving.² The bathroom and kitchen—often areas most in need of updates for aging in place—came out as the top two rooms many of us plan to tackle.

If you're planning on renovating, incorporate age-friendly design modifications. These modifications (listed below) can range from minor to major, depending on your needs.

Top Trends for Aging in Place

Here are the leading requests contractors hear when working with clients to upgrade their existing homes for longevity.



Throughout the House

- Level the home's entry way
- Main living on a single story, including full bath
- Good lighting, including night lighting
- Replace light switches with rocker switches and install lighted switch plates
- Enlarge doorways and hallways to 36 inches to accommodate a wheelchair
- Rugs securely affixed to the floor to avoid slipping



In the Bedroom

- Reduce the need to use the steps by shifting the bedroom to the main floor
- Mount handles on beds to help with getting in and out
- Install a closet storage system that makes things easy to reach
- Light colored paint on the walls to minimize shadows



In the Bathroom

- Grab bars near the toilet and in the shower/bathtub
- If stand-up shower is used in main bath, it should be curbless and minimum of 36-inches wide
- Toilet two and half inches higher than standard toilet
- Install mats and non-slip flooring
- Handheld shower head



Kitchen

- Lever or touchless faucets
- Cabinet pull-out shelves
- Upper wall cabinetry three inches lower than conventional height
- Countertops with rounded corners and edges
- Accented stripes on edge of countertops to provide visual orientation to the workspace
- D handle or a loop handles for cabinet doors

A Helping Hand

Understanding that modifications need to be made and working out the associated costs is one thing. Finding the right professionals to assist with those renovations is another. It's often not easy to track down the most qualified contractors. You can begin by searching for qualified professionals through The National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) program. The NAHB developed CAPS to

teach the technical, business management, and customer service skills essential in what's becoming one of the fastest-growing segments of the residential remodeling industry. CAPS-certified professionals can be a trusted ally in your quest to age in place. To find one in your area, visit nahb.org/nahb-community/nahb-directories for more information. Choose "Professionals with home building designations," then choose the CAPS filter.

Locate Trusted Service Providers

Preparing to age in place is about more than just home modifications. As we get older, our ability to do work around the house ourselves also may lessen. Household repairs, services, and ongoing maintenance are often overlooked in

our retirement planning. We might need a helping hand to complete these activities. Locating the right local businesses that specialize in the services can be a key strategy in helping accomplish some of these daily activities.

It's important to factor the expense of these home assistance services into your financial plan.

- House cleaning
- Home maintenance & basic repairs
- Lawn care & landscaping
- Grocery shopping & delivery
- Laundry
- Home modifications
- In-home medical services & devices
- Heavy lifting
- Organizing & decluttering



Envision Your Future Quality of Life

When you consider retirement planning, it's easy to lose sight of the forest for the trees. The first thing that comes to mind is probably, "How much money will I need?" But whatever that amount may be, your finances are only part of the equation for a meaningful retirement. We need to adopt an integrated and holistic approach to prepare ourselves to live longer and well in our homes. Identifying the necessary

steps to maintain our home may be just as critical to aging independently as the health of our retirement savings. Your financial professional can help integrate these issues into a comprehensive planning discussion to make planning to age in place more tangible for you and your family. Interested in learning more MIT AgeLab insights on aging? Visit hartfordfunds.com/life today for additional info.



The MIT AgeLab was created in 1999 to invent new ideas and creatively translate technologies into practical solutions that improve people’s health and enable them to “do things” throughout their lifespan. Based within MIT’s School of Engineering, the AgeLab applies consumer-centered systems thinking to understand the challenges and opportunities of longevity and emerging generational lifestyles to catalyze innovation across business markets. The MIT AgeLab provides insights to Hartford Funds about consumer behavior and decision-making, and trends in demographics, technology, and lifestyles. These trends impact the way people do business with financial-services providers.



Joseph F. Coughlin, Ph.D. is Director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab. His research examines how the disruptive demographics of an aging society, social trends, and technology will shape future innovations in business and government. Coughlin teaches in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning as well as Sloan School of Management Advanced Management Program. Coughlin is frequently interviewed by The Economist, The Financial Times, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Straights Times, and other business and technology publications.

¹ Older Adults’ Preparedness to Age in Place, University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, 4/22. Most recent data available.

² 2023 U.S. Houzz & Home Study: Renovation Trends, Houzz, 3/22/23

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