Home Adaptations for Amputees

Coming home from the hospital or rehab after amputation can be a very daunting experience and figuring out what needs to be modified can be a big decision and one that might change as time goes on. Both upper and lower limb amputees will have to make modifications to how they do things. For lower limb amputees, you will be heading home in a wheelchair or on crutches to finish healing before being fit with your prostheses. And for upper limb amputees, there will be devices that can help make daily tasks easier.

Home adaptations can be very costly so before making major renovations have conversations with your doctor and prosthetist about your ability to use prosthetics in the long term, this may change the decisions that you make in home modifications. There are some cities that provide financial assistance to individuals who become disabled and need their home remodeled to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Check on your city/county’s website to see if you qualify and how to proceed. A lot of these items can be rented or purchased second hand as well, so do a little research before making an expensive purchase.

Entrance way/Living Area

- If there are stairs leading into your home, you might have to get a ramp to enter into the house, you may not want this to be a permanent fixture. You might be able to rent one from a medical supply store or find one second hand online.
- Lighting outside is also important after sundown to prevent falls or accidents. You might even look into motion sensor lighting.
- You may also want to add a hand rail or grab rail on the steps leading up to your entryway, this can be helpful for both upper limb and lower limb amputees.
- For upper limb amputees, you might want to replace rounded doorknobs with a doorknob extender or doorknob with a lever.
- Some doors can be changed to hinge on the opposite side to create more space or removed completely until you are back up on your feet.
- You may also need to have doorways widened or offset hinges can be installed on doors if you will be using a wheelchair within your house.
- Within the living space, you will have to maintain clear paths for yourself when utilizing a wheelchair or even up on prosthetics, area rugs, clutter and wires can be all be trip hazards.
- If getting into and out of chairs is challenging, consider adding additional wedge cushions to it or look into purchasing a lift chair, which is an electronic chair that helps lift you to a standing position.
**Kitchen**

You may want to wait to make major adaptations to your kitchen until you know long term what will work for you.

But there are a number of things that can be done, including

- Taking out the cabinetry under the sink and lowering the sink to accommodate a wheelchair.
- Adding pull-down shelves to make contents reachable from a wheelchair.
- Lowering the kitchen cabinets so that they are accessible from a wheelchair.

In the short term, you can

- Utilize the lower cabinets for the items that you need daily and keep items on the counter top.
- Utilize your kitchen table for food prep, chopping etc. from a seated position.
- Gel pads can be placed under plates and bowls to prevent them from sliding around.
- You can also use a grabber to reach things from a seated position, careful with glassware from upper cabinets.

**Bedroom**

It might be tricky to maneuver within your bedroom until you get the hang of it. You might also have to rearrange the furniture so that you can move around in the space easily. Make sure that you can turn around in a wheelchair.

- The same rule goes as in the rest of the house with removing tripping hazards such as area rugs, clutter and any electrical wires.
- Lighting is important in the bedroom too. Consider a ‘touch on’ lamp for beside your bed so that it is easy to turn the light on at night.
- There are many ways to transfer into your bed, tools can include transfer boards, grab poles and hoyer lifts, these items can be found at medical supply stores but make sure to talk to your physical therapist if these types of items are necessary.
- At night make sure to keep your wheelchair or crutches within reach so that you can easily get out of bed without falling.

**Bathroom**

This can also be a place that can be modified at great cost but before you start knocking out walls, consider these options. Long term prosthetic shower or swim limbs can be made to be used in the shower (these are not usually covered by insurance) but do not forget to clean your residual limb every day.
• The primary need is a shower or bath chair or bench. You can use your crutches or wheelchair to get into the bathroom and then sit down into the shower chair. You can buy a shower chair from a medical supply store. You might end up wanting to keep it long term so that you don’t have to try to balance in the shower.
• If you cannot transfer directly in a bath chair in your bathroom, you might look into a rolling shower chair and transfer into the chair from your bed. You might need assistance being pushed into the shower area.
• Grab bars can be installed in your shower to help with a transfer in the shower chair. You can find removable grab bars if you don’t want to install permanent ones, just make sure they are secure.
• A non-slip mat for the floor of the shower can make showering standing up safer.
• A flexible, hand held shower head can be an easy change to help make showering easier.
• Using liquid soaps, shampoos, etc. with a pump head can be an easier way to maintain balance while in the shower.
• If you have shower doors, you might want to remove the doors and use a shower curtain for a short period for ease in and out of the shower. Do not attempt to remove these yourself!
• You can always adapt your bathroom to have a walk in shower, this is obviously a home modification and needs to be done by a professional. Even with a walk in shower, you may still want to have a shower chair option for safety.
• You may also want to install grab bars next to the toilet to help transfers onto the seat from a wheelchair or with your crutches.
• The sink can also be modified to accommodate a wheelchair but you will want to wait to make major changes until you know what you will be using long term, either a wheelchair or prosthetics.
• At night, you may want to make sure there is a night light installed in the bathroom so that you can see to move around.
There are resources and organizations that can help make home modifications for people with disabilities. The links below are great places to start.

www.rebuildingtogether.org

www.homemods.org/directory


References:

www.disability.gov

www.Iowaclinic.com

www.ageuk.org/adapting-your-home-guide

www.homemods.org

www.amputee-coalition.org

Limb Loss Resource Guide