

BEAVERTON VALLEYTIMES

Many of us are remodeling to age in place

Start with a safety assessment by a Home Instead caregiver

BY POLINA OLSEN

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Nancy and Ivan Watts always said there's no place like home.

That's why moving to their one-level Beaverton house and remodeling for aging-in-place made sense. Experience with Ivan Watt's elderly parents gave them insight. They started long before necessity dictated. Now both partially disabled, they find their comfortable home ready for them.

According to daughter Lynnae Rhoades, manager of Washington County Home Instead Senior Care, more than 90 percent of seniors want to remain at home. She helps people like her parents every day.

"If you let it go, you'll get into an emergency situation and a fire drill," she warned. "But, if you think ahead, you'll have perspective and control."

Control starts with a safety assessment by a Home Instead caregiver, Rhoades said. They look for trip hazards, like throw rugs and places where grab bars can help.

"We make it clear that grab bars should be installed by a professional. They need to be in the wall with studs. Seniors can rent or build a wheelchair ramp.

Rhoades believes falls are the greatest hazard. Often the elderly misjudge small things, like picking up their dog. Surprisingly, she finds they seldom fall down stairs.

"You're taught since you were little that stairs are dangerous, and banisters are professionally installed," she said. "But people don't want to rearrange furniture, don't want to use walkers, or don't want to give up those throw rugs, and they end up falling. Bathtubs are the biggest problem. It gets unstable to stand on one foot to lift the other. Sometimes people get in the bathtub and can't get out. They pull the towel rack off the wall because that's how they usually support themselves. If they don't have a medical alert or cell phone, they're stuck until someone finds them."

Rhoades' advice is simple: "Don't skimp on safety measures. Some people have the urge to do things partially. If you want to stay at home, plan and budget for each project, and have it completed well. Make sure grab bars are secure and doors are wide enough. There's lift chairs, several kinds of walkers, you can look at putting railings on your bed. Both from studying research and knowing seniors, I can say they thrive and are much happier in their homes."

Her mother, Nancy Watts, agrees. "Most things were not expensive," she said. With Rhoades' help, she and husband Ivan doubled door width by replacing single doors with attractive French doors. They removed the kitchen island so a wheelchair can pass and converted a little-used breakfast nook into a pantry complete with pullout shelves.

"Fortunately, the hall already was wide enough," Watts said. They replaced the tub with a walk-in



POLINA OLSEN / FOR TIMES NEWSPAPERS
Nancy Watts and her dog Cruiser show off a set of wheelchair-friendly French doors that replaced single doors in her Beaverton home.

shower complete with a bench. A low toilet makes transfer easy.

The bedroom was also setup for the family. Sliding glass doors open to a hot tub complete with grab bars and lifts. The king-size hospital bed features separate controls on each side so one person can sit while the other lies flat. Even miniature pinchers Penny and Cruiser are set to age in place. A doggy staircase from the pet store makes it easy for them to climb up and cuddle on the bed.

TIPS FOR AN AGING-IN-PLACE REMODEL

1. Have grab bars professionally installed.
2. Remove throw rugs or choose models with non-slip backs.
3. Watch out for floor surfaces. Make sure carpet is low pile and tiles are non-slip.
4. Cover stairs with rough material. A light strip along each edge helps you see where each stair ends.
5. Replace the bathtub with a walk-in shower with a bench inside. Or install a bathtub slide board.
6. Don't use ladders or stepstools.
7. Do use a grabber to reach lightweight objects on high shelves.
8. Keep it light: Think about installing motion sensor lights, and make sure the path from your garage to the house is well illuminated.
9. Pullout storage means no more crawling into cabinets.
10. Lever style handles on your doors and faucets may be easier to manage than knobs.
11. Have someone regularly check on you.
12. Use a medical alert service or carry a cell phone at all times. Remember, you designate whom the service calls first. The service will try a family member or neighbor before calling an ambulance, if you prefer.
13. Make sure your contractor is a certified aging-in-place specialist.

(For more information, or to find a certified aging in place specialist, visit portlandonline.com, type aging-in-place in the upper right corner search box, click the right arrow and then select Aging-In-Place Tools. Contact Washington County Home Instead Senior Care at 503-530-1527.)