

A Guide for Those with Disabilities to Remain Independent at Home



We start the month of July with a celebration of our nation's independence, and also recognize the establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, a driving force for prohibiting discrimination against people living with disabilities. Truly a month to observe our freedoms, we close out July with National Disability Independence Day. This year will mark the 32nd anniversary of the day the ADA was signed – giving us all even more to celebrate.

According to the [National Health Council](#), more than 160 million people in the U.S. live with chronic diseases and disabilities. The likelihood that a person will develop a disability increases with age. Fortunately, there are many tools and resources available to help adults with disabilities live independently at home.

A Support System

Building a support system is one of the most important things you can do to maintain your independence at home. Members of this group may include:

- **Family.** Talk with your loved ones and determine how they may be willing to assist you, even if that is just checking in on you or having regular conversations with you.
- **Friends.** Check in with your friends and see how you can help each other. It is easy to barter or trade errands or simply provide camaraderie for each other.



- **Healthcare at Home Aides.** Professional providers of at-home services are a powerful layer of support for many people. They help provide additional coverage in areas where friends and family are unable to assist.

Home Safety

There are many things you can do to ensure your home environment is as safe as possible for yourself and your loved ones. A few areas for consideration:

- **Universal design.** If you have the resources to remodel your home, focus on finding a remodeler with a [Universal Design Certified Professional](#) designation from the National

CONTINUED ►

Association of the Remodeling Industry. These professionals focus on making housing usable by people with a broad range of needs.

- **Doorways.** Consider widening your home's doorways if you will need wheelchair access. A doorway width of 36 inches with swing-clear hinges should work well for most people.
- **Bathrooms.** Modifications that can help improve bathroom accessibility include installing a shower/accessible tub, raised toilet seat, and grab bars.
- **Wheelchair ramps.** These can help improve entrance into a home with steps. Portable options called suitcase ramps are a good choice for many people who want a less expensive option.
- **Flooring.** Consider replacing thick carpeting, which can be difficult for wheelchairs, or slippery flooring. Replace with rubber, cork, or even vinyl flooring.
- **Remove hazards.** Trip hazards like rugs, cords, small furniture, clutter, and decorative items should be removed to improve safety. Organize furniture to allow for easy movement throughout the home.
- **Get assistance.** Healthcare at home providers can conduct an assessment and help people living with disabilities improve their overall home safety.

Home Monitoring Equipment

Gain peace of mind with the addition of appropriate safety equipment to your home. Some popular options include:

- **Security cameras.** Consider installing cameras with a live view option to allow family members to check in on your safety. Doorbell cameras can also help ensure that anyone who is visiting the home has permission to be there. Many cameras can be monitored via smartphones to provide that extra peace of mind.
- **Medical alert system.** These systems provide users with a pendant or wristband equipped with a button they can press if they need help. Some units also are equipped with automatic fall detection or GPS tracking.
- **Smoke detectors.** These important devices, along with carbon monoxide detectors, can notify you when you need to leave your home in a hurry. Some can be connected to your home security system to notify the proper authorities immediately if a situation arises.

Transportation

Being able to get where you need to go is incredibly important, and it can mean the difference between remaining independent at home and requiring significant assistance. If you cannot operate your own vehicle, these resources may be able to help:

- **Public transportation.** Many counties throughout the country offer low-cost public transportation for seniors and those living with disabilities. Contact your local [Area Agency on Aging](#) for information about programs in your county.
- **Reliable family and friends.** Discuss with

CONTINUED ►

your network of loved ones the possibility of them helping you get to important appointments or simply bringing you along for grocery shopping and other common errands.

- **Uber/Lyft/Taxi.** Ride service can be a safe and timely way to get you where you're going.
- **Healthcare-at-home providers.** These services can ensure you get to your doctor, physical therapy, or other important appointments safely and on time.

Convenience Devices

There are many small changes you can make at home to make living independently easier and less stressful. Some specialized tools that may help include:

- **Reach aids.** This is a simple device with long or telescoping handles that help you reach difficult places. These include extendable scrubbers, grabber tools, long-handled shower sponges, sock aids, and other tools with long handles.
- **Adaptive utensils.** These specialized utensils help people with limited mobility or problems with hand stabilization feed themselves without assistance. You can also consider hand gripper aids to help you easily hold small utensils like pens and toothbrushes.
- **Smart devices.** Start by outfitting your home with things like smart plugs and other smart devices. Adding a voice-activated system like the Amazon Echo or Google Home is one way to use technology to help make life a little easier. You can turn off

lights, play music, or check the weather with just your voice.

- **Kitchen tools.** Simplify your cooking process by adding tools like a microwave steamer to eliminate the need to carry boiling water across the kitchen, or an automatic jar opener to make opening sauces and other items easier.
- **Mini refrigerator.** Placing one of these small units in a convenient spot, like your bedroom, can be a big help when you don't want to – or don't feel like – heading to the kitchen for a drink or snack.
- **Shower upgrades.** Consider installing a handheld showerhead, grab bars, or shower chair to make bathing safer and easier.
- **Better lighting.** By brightening up your space, you can more easily spot trip hazards to get around your home safely.
- **Practical clothes.** Look at your wardrobe and make sure you can easily put on and remove your clothing. You may need to look toward styles with elastic waists, Velcro closures, and loose sleeves.
- **Standing aid.** A variety of portable devices are available to help you rise from your bed, couch, or chair safely.

In-Home Care Services

Professional providers of in-home care are experienced at working to help the individuals they assist to live at home with the greatest level of independence possible. These services are beneficial to many.

CONTINUED ►

- **Personal care.** Healthcare-at-home providers can assist with bathing, washing hair, or getting dressed. Turning to expert providers of these activities of daily living can be transformative.
- **Medication assistance.** Get help portioning out your medication for the week or setting up medication reminders so you never forget a dose.
- **Household chores.** Housekeeping services can remove a large burden and allow you to spend more time doing the things you want to do.
- **Meals and nutrition.** Get help making mealtime more manageable. You can also learn how to get all the nutrition you need to live well, and how to follow any dietary restrictions your doctor may recommend.
- **Companionship.** An open ear can help alleviate boredom and loneliness, making the experience of living at home more enjoyable.

Whatever your situation, there are several things you can do to remain comfortably and independently at home. Get started by reviewing your personal situation and considering what assistance might work best for you.

If you or a loved one need care at home, Intrepid USA is here to assist. Email help@intrepidusa.com to speak with a Patient Advocate today.