



For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide

Module 4

The Accessible Home

Participant Guide

Module 4

The Accessible Home

PURPOSE

Module 4 will provide an overview of how to make your home more accessible, including the benefits and barriers. Caregivers will learn what a home modification is, how to assess their home for safety, when and how to make changes to improve accessibility, and the available options to pay for these changes.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Describe what a home modification is and when changes should be made.
- Understand the benefits to making home modifications.
- Describe minor and major modifications.
- Identify barriers to making home modifications.
- Identify resources to make and pay for modifications.
- Use a home safety checklist.

This module will describe what home modifications are, and help you determine when changes to a home should be made using a home safety checklist. It will also discuss benefits and barriers to home modifications. There are many types of modifications that we will talk about in this module. Making changes to a home can be expensive, so we will present ways to pay for these modifications.

NOTE: If you are renting a home, you will need to obtain the written consent of the owner/landlord before making modifications.

HOME MODIFICATION-WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

A home modification means making home renovations, alterations, or modifications to increase accessibility, safety, and independence. It may include installing ramps, grab bars, a stair lift, widening doorways, making a shower wheelchair accessible, and much more.

Changes to a home should be made when a care recipient cannot get around safely or easily. Ask for advice from experienced people that have already made modifications to their home. Changes can be made to an already existing home you live in, are planning to live in, or to a new home you are building.

Assistive technology can also make daily living easier. Assistive technology is the topic of Module 11, where it is discussed in detail.

REASONS FOR HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Accidental injury
- Long-term illness or disability
- Recovery from surgery
- Temporary inability or injury

Changes are often made to a home after a care recipient has been injured in an accident or has gone through a recent surgery. Sometimes a long-term illness or disability will make home modifications necessary.

BENEFITS OF HOME MODIFICATIONS

There are many benefits to modifying your home. Your home will become safer with less likelihood of accident or injury. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services states that, “Falls are the leading cause of death from injury in the elderly. More than 1/3 of adults over age 65 fall each year. 50% of persons hospitalized after a

fall will never be able to live independently again. Of those hospitalized, only 50% will be alive one year later.” When a person falls and severely injures themselves, they may jump from being able to live with or without assistance straight into skilled nursing.

An accessible home may also help your care recipient live at home longer. He or she may be happier, healthier, and more independent at home. If these changes are not made, the care recipient may have to move to a more costly assisted living center or nursing home. By staying in their own home, they can avoid the disruption and distress of having to move.

Caregivers have a number of responsibilities and sometimes it is difficult to take the time to think about home modifications and when they might be needed. To give you an opportunity to think about fall hazards and accessibility issues, review the Home Safety Checklist on the following pages and check those items that may be potential fall hazards or accessibility issues. You may also wish to consider concerns that may be emerging in the next few years as the care recipient’s sight deteriorates or as he or she becomes physically frailer.

Rebuilding Together, www.rebuildingtogether.org, has long recognized that greater attention must be given to the U.S. elderly population so they may age in place safely in their homes. Rebuilding Together has also built lasting national partnerships with Area Agencies on Aging, AARP, American Occupational Therapy Association, National Association of Home Builders, National Council on Aging, and others.

Use the Checklist on the next pages to identify home safety, fall hazards, and accessibility issues for the homeowner and family members. Home safety, fall prevention, and accessibility

modification interventions on the second page can help prioritize your work. Underline or use a highlighter to note problems and add comments.



Safe AT HOME Checklist

Created in partnership with the Administration on Aging and the
American Occupational Therapy Association

Rebuilding Together
1536 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
800-4-REHAB-9

1. EXTERIOR ENTRANCES AND EXITS

- Note condition of walk and drive surface; existence of curb cuts
- Note handrail condition, right and left sides
- Note light level for driveway, walk, porch
- Check door threshold height
- Note ability to use knob, lock, key, mailbox, peephole, and package shelf
- Do door and window locks work easily?
- Are the house numbers visible from the street?
- Are bushes and shrubs trimmed to allow safe access?
- Is there a working doorbell?

2. INTERIOR DOORS, STAIRS, HALLS

- Note height of door threshold, knob and hinge types; clear width door opening; determine direction that door swings
- Note presence of floor level changes
- Note hall width, adequate for walker/wheelchair
- Determine stair flight run: straight or curved
- Note stair rails: condition, right and left side
- Examine light level, clutter hazards
- Note floor surface texture and contrast

3. BATHROOM

- Are sink basin and tub faucets, shower control and drain plugs manageable?
- Are hot water pipes covered?
- Is mirror height appropriate, sit and stand?
- Note ability to reach shelf above, below basin
- Note ability to step in/out of bath/shower
- Can resident use bath bench in tub or shower?
- Note toilet height; ability to reach paper; flush; come from sit to stand posture
- Is space available for caregiver to assist?

4. KITCHEN

- Note overall light level, task lighting
- Note sink and counter heights
- Note wall and floor storage shelf heights
- Are under sink hot water pipes covered?
- Is there under counter knee space?
- Is there a nearby surface to rest hot foods on when removed from oven?
- Note stove control location (rear or front)
- Is there adequate counter space to safely prepare meals?

5. LIVING, DINING, BEDROOM

- Chair, sofa, bed heights allow sitting or standing?
- Do rugs have non-slip pad or rug tape?
- Chair available with arm rests?
- Able to turn on light, radio, TV, place a phone call from bed, chair, and sofa?

6. LAUNDRY

- Able to hand-wash and hang clothes to dry?
- Able to access automatic washer/dryer?

7. BASEMENT

- Are the basement stairs stable and well lit?
- Is there any storage of combustible materials?

8. TELEPHONE AND DOOR

- Phone jack location near bed, sofa, chair?
- Able to get phone, dial, hear caller?
- Able to identify visitors, hear doorbell?
- Able to reach and empty mailbox?
- Wears neck/wrist device to obtain emergency help?
- Is there an answering machine?
- Is there a wireless phone system?

9. STORAGE SPACE

- Able to reach closet rods and hooks, open bureau drawers?
- Is there a light inside the closet?

10. WINDOWS

- Opening mechanism at 42 inches from floor?
- Lock accessible, easy to operate?
- Sill height above floor level?
- Are storm windows functional?

11. ELECTRIC OUTLETS AND CONTROLS

- Sufficient outlets?
- Are there ground fault outlets in kitchen and bathroom?
- Light switch at the entrance to each room?
- Outlet height, wall locations
- Low vision/sound warnings available?
- Extension cord hazard?
- Are there any uncovered outlets or switches?

12. HEAT, LIGHT, VENTILATION, SECURITY, CARBON MONOXIDE, WATER TEMP CONTROL

- Are there smoke/CO detectors and a fire extinguisher?
- Thermometer displays easily accessible and readable?
- Note rooms where poor light level exists
- Able to open windows; slide patio doors?
- Able to open drapes or curtains?
- Note last service date for heating/cooling system
- Observe temperature setting of the water heater

COMMENTS:

1. EXTERIOR ENTRANCES AND EXITS

- Increase lighting at entry area
- Install stair rails on both sides
- Install door lever handles; double-bolt lock
- Install beveled, no step, no trip threshold
- Remove screen or storm door if needed
- Create surface to place packages when opening door
- Install peephole on exterior door
- Repair holes, uneven joints on walkway
- Provide non-slip finish to walkway surface
- Add ramp as needed
- Trim bushes and shrubs to provide clear view from doors and windows
- Trim low hanging branches

2. INTERIOR DOORS, HALLS, STAIRS

- Create clear pathways between rooms
- Apply color contrast or texture change at top and bottom stair edges
- Install door lever handle
- Install swing-clear hinges to widen doorway. minimum width: 32 inches
- Install beveled thresholds (max 1/2 inch)
- Replace or add non-slip surface on steps
- Repair or install stair handrails on both sides

3. BATHROOM

- Install swing-clear hinges to widen doorway. minimum width: 32 inches
- Install secure wall reinforcement and place grab bars at toilet, bath, and shower
- Install adjustable-height shower head
- Install non-slip strips in bath/shower
- Secure floor bathmat with non-slip, double-sided rug tape
- Elevate toilet height by adding under seat riser portable seat or raising toilet base on a pedestal
- Adapt flush handle or install flush sensor
- Adapt or relocate toilet paper dispenser
- Round counter corners to provide safety
- Insulate hot water pipes if exposed
- Create sitting knee clearance at basin by removing vanity door and shelves underneath
- Install mirror for sitting or standing view
- Install good-quality non-glare lighting
- Install shower with no threshold if bathing abilities are severely limited

4. KITCHEN

- Increase task lighting at sink, stove, etc.
- Install D-type cupboard door handles
- Install adjustable shelving to increase access to upper cabinets
- Increase access to under counter storage space by installing pull-out units
- Insulate hot water pipes if exposed
- Install hot-proof surface near oven
- Install switches and outlets at front of counter
- Install pressure-balanced, temperature-regulated, lever faucets
- Expand counter surface
- Create sitting knee clearance under work sites by removing doors or shelves
- Improve color contrast of cabinet and counters surface edges for those with low vision
- Add tactile and color-contrasted controls for those with low vision

- Provide sturdy step stool with hand rail
- Clean or install new range hood

5. LIVING, DINING, BEDROOM

- Widen or clear pathways within each room by rearranging furniture
- Secure throw and area rug edges with double-sided tape
- Improve access to and from chairs and beds by inserting risers under furniture legs
- Use side bed rail or chairs with armrests
- Install telephone jack near chair or bed
- Enlarge lamp switch or install touch-control lamp at bedside
- Install adjustable closet rods, shelving and light source for better storage access
- Install vertical pole adjacent to chair and sofa
- Raise furniture to appropriate height using leg extender products
- Install uniform level floor surfaces using wood, tile, or low-pile rugs
- Install telephone jack near bed and favorite chair

6. LAUNDRY

- Build a counter for sorting and folding clothes
- Adjust clothesline to convenient height
- Relocate laundry appliances
- Clean dryer vent or replace with metallic hose

7. BASEMENT

- Identify and eliminate sources of water in basement (usually gutter or plumbing)
- Add additional lighting as needed
- Remove combustible materials and hazardous waste
- Clear pathway to utilities

8. TELEPHONE AND DOOR

- Install phone jacks near bed, sofa, and chair
- Install peephole at convenient height
- Install flashing light or sound amplifier to indicate ringing doorbell for those with visual or hearing problems
- Install mailbox at accessible height

9. STORAGE SPACE

- Install lights inside closet
- Install adjustable closet rods and shelves
- Install bi-fold or pocket doors

10. WINDOWS

- Install handles and locks that are easy to grip, placed at appropriate heights
- Replace windows that are not functional

11. ELECTRICAL OUTLETS AND CONTROLS

- Install light fixtures or outlet for lamps
- Install switches at top and bottom of stairs
- Install ground fault outlets in kitchen and bathroom
- Install wireless light switches where needed

12. HEAT, AIR, LIGHT, SECURITY, WATER TEMP, CARBON MONOXIDE CONTROLS

- Install smoke/CO detectors, fire extinguishers
- Increase residents' access to environmental control systems
- Replace thermostat with easy to read programmable type
- Order service for heating/AC system
- Install Compact Florescent lights where appropriate
- Reduce hot water temperature to 120 degrees

TYPES OF HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Minor
- Major

Minor home modifications can include, but are not limited to lighting, water temperature controls, mobility, storage, flooring, rugs, stairways, and furniture placement. Major home modifications can include, but are not limited to adding a ramp or lift, adding room(s), and widening doorways and entrances.



Home with a ramp

Making modifications in a kitchen could include lowering counter tops and changing the direction that a refrigerator door swings. A major change in a bathroom could be making a shower wheelchair accessible, adding a permanent shower seat or separating it from the tub.

MINOR HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Lighting
- Water Temperature Controls
- Mobility

Install an anti-scald water temperature control device.

Lighting

- Change bulbs to the maximum wattage.
- Add more fixtures where lighting is poor.
- Install motion sensor lights.
- Install touch or rocker type switches.
- Use night lights, especially in areas that will be accessed during the night, like hallways and bathrooms.
- Lower or add light switches.
- Investigate and/or purchase other types of lights/lamps.
- Install raised dots or lighted switches to locate on/off switches.

Water Temperature Controls

- Install devices to control the temperature of the water, like anti-scald valves.
- Turn the temperature of the hot water heater down so that the water is 120 degrees Fahrenheit or less.

Strategies to Enhance Mobility and Safety

- Place electrical cords out of the way so that they are not in the path of travel.
- Move furniture so there is a clear pathway.
- Ensure chair availability for those who can't walk far.
- Remove loose rugs that may cause a fall.
- Only use non-slip backing rugs, but may still cause tripping.
- Install or use equipment to prevent falls, such as grab bars.

OTHER MINOR HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Storage
- Flooring and Rugs

- Stairway
- Doors
- Other

Flooring and Stairways

- Securely fasten all flooring.
- Increase visibility of stairs and uneven floors by using a contrasting color or tape.
- Install handrails and make sure stairways are well lit.
- It may be necessary to install a non-skid tape to the edge of stairs to prevent slipping.
- Low pile carpet or a hard floor covering surface may need to be installed to allow a family member who uses a wheelchair or walker to move around easier.

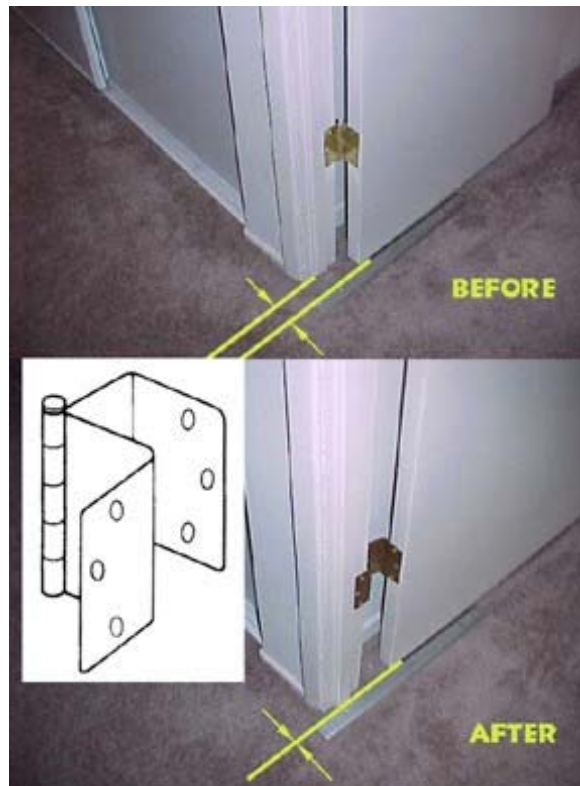
Accessible Storage

- Move items so that they are easy to reach, placing them no higher than shoulder height or no lower than a person's waist.
- Replace drawer and cabinet hardware with handles that are easier to grasp and that don't require twisting or squeezing to open a drawer or cabinet.

Accessible Door and Doorway

- Sometimes to accommodate a wheelchair or a walker, a doorway threshold may need to be lowered or removed to allow easier access for walkers and/or wheelchairs.
- To widen a doorway without extensive remodeling a "swing-clear-offset door hinge" can replace existing hinges to add a couple of inches to the doorway. They are designed to swing the door clear of the opening.

- You may also remove the door and doorjamb stops to increase the opening size.
- Install kick plates on the bottom part of the door to protect the door from the footrests on the wheelchair.
- A standard interior door is between 30 to 36 inches. Most wheelchairs and walkers need at least 32 to 34 inches minimum clearance.



Offset door hinges widen doorways 2” by pushing the door out of the way giving access to the full width of the doorway frame.

Easier Transfers

- Increase the height of the bed for making transfers and care of the person you are caring for easier by putting supports under the legs.

- A lift chair can help someone get up out of a chair independently.
- Raising couches and chairs with blocks or bricks creates a higher seat that makes getting up and down much easier.
- Use a bath transfer bench for someone who can't step over the edge of a tub.

Accessible Bathroom

- Install grab bars.
- Install levered handles on faucets.
- Install moveable or hand-held shower heads.
- Use portable shower chairs.
- Place non-skid strips or decals in the shower or tub.



Shower chair with a back that straddles the side of the tub.

MAJOR HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Widen walkways outside.
- Widen entrances and doorways.
- Install door openers.
- Install ramps or lifts.
- Convert an existing room on main floor.
- Add on to the home.



Home that has a long wheelchair ramp with wide white handrails.

Outside Entries

Sometimes more extensive changes need to take place for a person to be able to get around their home. These include, but are not limited to widening walkways outside, making entrances and doorways wider, widening hallways, moving or installing light switches, installing ramps or lifts, and remodeling kitchens and/or bathrooms. You can add a bedroom and bathroom on the ground level floor by remodeling an existing room or building an addition onto the home.

Sometimes extensive changes need to take place.

Walkways and sidewalks outside the home sometimes need to be widened to allow wheelchairs or walkers to be used on them. Entrances into the home and doorways into the rooms of the home may need to be changed to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers. This can be done by changing the hinges, as mentioned previously, or by remodeling and widening the doorway. The minimum doorway width for a wheelchair is generally 32 inches.

Ramps and Lifts

If stairs provide the only way into a house, a ramp or lift may need to be installed. Ramps can be built in permanently or put in place temporarily. A level space both outside and inside each entrance into the home is necessary if a wheelchair will be used in the home. This level space should be at least five feet square.

If the bedroom and bathroom are not on the ground level floor, a lift may need to be installed. Another option would be to convert an existing room into a bedroom and add a bathroom to the ground level floor of the house.

OTHER MAJOR HOME MODIFICATIONS

- Widen hallways
- Move or install light switches
- Remodel kitchens and/or bathrooms
- Adding rooms
- Add stair glide or elevator

Some other more extensive changes may need to take place for a person to be able to get around their home. These include, but are not limited to widening hallways, moving or installing light switches, remodeling kitchens and/or bathrooms, and adding rooms to the home. You can add a bedroom and bathroom on the ground level floor by remodeling an existing room or building an addition onto the home.

Accessible Hallways and Entries

- If possible, hallways should be widened to four feet. This would be a major change and often times impossible if a hallway wall is a bearing wall.

- Swinging a door to the outside will provide more space in a room.
- Install an automatic or push button door opener on doors.



Walk-in shower with no lip to step over.

Accessible Bathrooms

- A shower may need to have a wider opening, with little or no threshold, to enable access by a wheelchair user or someone who can't step over the edge of a tub.
- Counter tops may need to be lowered.
- More space may need to be added around toilets.
- Automatic faucets, dryers, and soap/shampoo dispensers can be helpful if a person has limited hand usage or upper body strength.

Accessible Kitchens

- A lazy-susan or pull-out shelving provide easier access to items.
- Counter tops may need to be lowered or adjustable.
- Floor cabinets can be modified to allow space for the footrest on a wheelchair.

- A wall oven may need to be installed.
- Wrap colored tape around post handles for better visibility.
- Use raised dots for location of on/off switches.

BARRIERS TO MODIFYING YOUR HOME

- Lack of money
- Large project
- Difficulty of the project
- Lack of knowledge

The lack of money is probably the biggest barrier to modifying your home. Remodeling a bathroom or kitchen is a major project and can be very costly and difficult. Obviously, changing a door knob is easier than adding a walk-in shower or installing a ramp. Not knowing how to do something can also be a barrier. One person may know how to install a new light switch or add a ground fault interrupt outlet. Someone else may not have the know-how to do those things. That is why it is important to ask family and friends or professionals for assistance.

CONCLUSION

Home modifications are sometimes necessary to enable the care recipient to remain in their home and be safe. These changes are sometimes minor and others are more extensive and require a lot of remodeling. There are some possible barriers, but hopefully this module has given you ways to overcome them. There are a number of agencies and organizations that can help with making your home more accessible. We hope this training has been useful and informative.

RESOURCES TO HELP WITH HOME MODIFICATION

- Assist, Inc.

There are several agencies that can assist

- State Division of Aging and Adult Services
- Local Area Agency on Aging
- Centers for Independent Living
- Elder Care Locator
- Call 211
- Local home improvement or hardware stores
- Utah Assistive Technology Foundation

There are several organizations and agencies that can help with home modifications. These organizations, including their contact information, are listed below.

Assist, Inc.

Assist, Inc. is a non-profit agency in Utah that helps homeowners plan home modifications to accommodate family members with disabilities. Assist, Inc. may visit the home, do an assessment, and give ideas for what modifications might be feasible. The agency also has information, model plans, and drawings that can be used by architects and builders. <http://www.assistutah.org>

218 East 500 South

Salt Lake City, UT 84111

801-355-7085

Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services

This division administers a wide variety of home and community-based services for Utah residents who are 60 or older to allow them to remain independent. Programs and services are primarily delivered by a network of 12 Area Agencies on Aging which reach all areas of the state. <http://www.hsdaas.utah.gov>

Area Agencies on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging provide information, services, advocacy, and assistance to the elderly and their caregivers. Your local area

agency on aging can help you find information and may have funding available for home modifications. To find your local area Agency on Aging call 1-877-424-4640 or look it up at the following website: <http://www.hsdaas.utah.gov>

Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

CILs are private, non-profit organizations that provide services to maximize the independence of individuals with disabilities, and the accessibility of the communities they live in. CILs are funded in part by the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, to provide several core services which include advocacy, independent living skills training, information and referral, and peer counseling. There are 6 CILs and 5 satellite centers in Utah with information and some limited funding available for home modifications to low-income applicants with disabilities. To find the closest CIL, call 1-800-473-7530 or look at: www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/utah.html

Elder Care Locator

The Eldercare Locator is a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging. The Eldercare Locator connects older Americans and their caregivers with sources of information on senior services. Elder Care refers callers to local agencies that handle home modifications. www.eldercare.gov or call 1-800-677-1116.

Dial 211

Free information and referral line to find resources for health, human, and community services. www.informationandreferral.org 1-801-978-3333 or 1-888-826-9790.

OTHER RESOURCES

- State Housing Finance Agency

- Utah Assistive Technology Foundation
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Other

State Housing Finance Agency (Utah Housing Corporation)

The Utah Housing Corporation assists in the creation of affordable housing opportunities for lower-income Utah households. UHC provides mortgage monies to qualifying first time homebuyers. 1-800-284-6950; 1-801-902-8200 or visit

<http://www.utahhousingcorp.org/HTML/aboutUHC.shtml>

The Utah Assistive Technology Foundation

The Utah Assistive Technology Foundation is a non-profit statewide organization that offers low-interest loans and small grants for home modifications. Call 800-524-5152 or visit

<http://www.uatf.org>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, website has lots of information on buying, financing, and remodeling homes. Call 801-538-8723 or visit

www.hud.gov/buying, www.hud.gov/improvements

The following agencies and organizations can also help you:

National Caregiver Support Program

Fact sheet on home modifications and assistive devices:

http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/press_room/products_materials/fact/pdf/home_modification.pdf

http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/Press_Room/Products_Materials/fact/pdf/Assistive_Technology.pdf

National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification

A university-based, non-profit organization dedicated to promote independent living for persons of all ages and abilities. A National Directory of Home Modification Resources is available at www.homemods.org

Infinite Potential through Assistive Technology

This website offers many good resources about home modifications including funding ideas.

www.infinitec.org

<http://www.infinitec.org/live/homemodifications/basics.htm>

AbleData

This website offers a huge database of information on 40,000 assistive devices, books, articles, publications, product reviews, and more. www.abledata.com

American Association of Retired Persons

The AARP offers information on universal design, and on making your home safer and more accessible.

<http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/livable-communities/info-04-2011/universal-design-helps-people-age-in-their-homes.html>

<http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/learn/housing/info-12-2012/designing-for-better-learning.html>

<http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/livable-communities/info-07-2011/make-your-home-a-safe-home.html>

<http://www.aarp.org/home-family/livable-communities/info-07-2012/universal-design-ny1788.html>

Administration on Aging

The Administration on Aging has a number of fact sheets, including home modifications.

http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Home_Modifications.aspx

Lifespan

Lifespan Home Modifications is a small, progressive company specializing in adapting single-family residences for independent living. <http://www.homemodification.com>

UCARE MODULE TOPICS

1. Providing Personal Care
2. Dementia and Memory Loss
3. A) Caring for Older Adults with Chronic Health Issues
3. B) Caring for Children with Special Health Care Needs
4. The Accessible Home
5. Taking Care of the Caregiver
6. Caring for those with Depression, Anxiety, Stress, or Mental Health Issues
7. Community Supports for Remaining at Home
8. Working Effectively with In-Home Service Providers
9. Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care for Safe
10. Eating Healthy for Life
11. Assistive Devices: Tools to Help You
12. Legal and Financial Matters: What You Need to Know

For more information, please visit: <http://www.ucare.utah.gov>

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For more information, please visit: <http://www.ucare.utah.gov>,
or email: ucare@utah.gov

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