

Aging in Place

There's a phenomenon sweeping America. Today, one in eight citizens is 65 or older. Within 25 years, however, that will increase to one in five, as 80 million Baby Boomers head into retirement.

Where previous generations tended to move into managed care facilities or retirement communities, Boomers have other ideas. When AARP surveyed its members recently, more than 80% of respondents said they intended to stay in their homes for the rest of their lives.

That option, called "aging in place", offers several advantages, from maintaining a familiar and comfortable community environment to independence and safety. Seniors also list proximity to family and friends, and convenient access to services as primary reasons to stay in their homes.

There is an economic factor, too. According to the [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/18/health/18patient.html?_r=1&em), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/18/health/18patient.html?_r=1&em "The average annual fee at an assisted-living facility – a place where older people live independently but also receive a host of services like medication monitoring and meals – is \$34,000. And in the nation's most expensive metropolitan areas, including New York, the costs may be closer to \$70,000."

While aging in place provides significant advantages, there are some challenges. Most important is that as our needs and capabilities change with age, our homes need to change to meet those shifting realities. Homeowners can address this by planning ahead and enlisting the help of a professional builder who is also a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS).

CAPS professionals can help you design and incorporate features in a new home to maximize convenience and adaptability as you age. They can also plan and execute a remodel to meet those changing realities in an existing home.

In a new home, it's reasonably simple to incorporate features that support aging in place, such as a first floor master suite, no-step entry, and wider interior doors and hallways to accommodate scooters and wheelchairs. You might even choose a private elevator to access upper floors if stair climbing is difficult.

Features that make life easier in either new construction or a remodel can be as simple as fixtures and controls that are easier for arthritic hands to handle, smoke detectors with strobe lights for hearing impaired individuals, and color contrasting on / off buttons that are easier to see. Other safety and convenience items include enhanced high and low frequency tones for doorbells and telephones, grab bars and hand rails in designer colors, walk-in showers with pull-down seats, and variable countertop heights.

CAPS professionals can help make sure your floor plans can be adapted for special needs, and that your appliances and fixtures are functional, easy to use and aesthetically pleasing. Most important, they can help you make sure your home is safe, supportive and comfortable as the circumstances of your life evolve. To find a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist, please visit our [Members List](#).

Additional resources on the benefits and challenges of aging in place are available from a variety of sources.

The Federal Department of Health and Human Services offers a concise [Fact Sheet](http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/fact_sheets/home_mod.aspx) on home modifications for aging in place.
http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Resources/fact_sheets/home_mod.aspx

Rebuilding Together, Inc. also has a good [home modification checklist](http://www.rebuildingtogether.org/content/resource/detail/1192/).
<http://www.rebuildingtogether.org/content/resource/detail/1192/>

Senior Resource offers an extensive [guide to aging in place](http://www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#place), including a list of potential modifications to remedy specific challenges associated with aging. <http://www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#place>