

Kitchen Accessibility Checklist



Universal design can make the kitchen accessible for kids as well as the elderly or physically challenged.

To make the kitchen more accessible, safe and comfortable for chefs of any age and ability, the Center for Inclusive Design & Environmental Access at the State University of New York at Buffalo has a number of recommendations.

If you have bad eyesight, the center suggests installing undercabinet lighting and using contrasting colors in your design scheme. For example, light-colored plates and silverware will show up better on a dark-colored countertop, and canned goods will stand out more in cabinets with white interiors.

To keep the kitchen safe for running kids and unsteady walkers, pass up throw rugs and slippery floor surfaces such as polished marble or glazed ceramic tile for vinyl, laminate or hardwood flooring coated with a nonslip finish. Add a sturdy metal or wood decorative rail along countertop edges for additional support. Reinforce the hardware inside lower cabinet doors and drawers in case they are leaned on for support.

Avoid bending and stooping and reduce the risk of throwing out your back by raising the dishwasher 8 inches and using cabinet accessories like rollout shelves and lazy Susans that make items easier to reach.

Bring relief to arthritis with a single-lever faucet installed on the side of the sink instead of behind it, or with a hands-free electronic faucet. Mount a potfiller faucet over the cooktop so there's no need to lug hot pots back and forth from the sink. Select cabinet and drawer pulls large enough to grip with your entire hand or opt for magnetic touch-and-release doors.

To provide wheelchair accessibility and make room for people who prefer to work sitting down, raise the toekick spaces and leave open space for knee clearance underneath the sink, the cooktop and a countertop area. Also, allow enough room in a central area for a wheelchair to be turned around.

Other design tips include:

- Use halogen cooktops. The burners glow red even if not on the highest settings.
- Use audible and visual warnings to increase the chances that you won't miss a signal from the microwave, refrigerator, or other appliance.
- Use a rolling server cart that coordinates with the cabinets to bring food to the table, dirty dishes to the sink, or groceries to the refrigerator.

- Include countertop work surfaces ranging in height or adjustable in height from 28 inches to 42 inches to accommodate all tasks and statures, from children to seated individuals to those over 6 feet tall.
- Store items close to the work area where they will be used.
- Buy a side-by-side refrigerator/freezer to prevent stooping to reach into a top-bottom model.
- Make preparing meals easier by placing refrigerator drawer units right where the food will be used.
- Avoid small dials that require fine motor control or twisting of the wrist. Instead choose sliding controls, push plates, or push buttons.
- Choose easy to clean surfaces, such as glass cooktops and smooth countertops.
- Include a decorative, raised countertop edge to prevent spills from dripping down the sides of cabinets and onto the floor and to stop dishes and utensils from falling.
- Add backsplash accessories, such as open shelves and hanging racks, to provide handy storage for everyday items from spices to spatulas.