

# Accessibility retrofits and gadgets

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Although we tend to associate the term accessibility with wheelchairs, in reality it is much larger than that. Accessibility can relate to people who are extremely short or extremely tall, to very young people or very old people who have trouble holding on to things, or seeing things -- anyone who doesn't fit that kind of non-existent 'average' homeowner for whom everything is designed and built. Victor Helfand from Barrier Free Architecturals, an accessibility speciality store in Toronto, Ontario showed us a very interesting tapered mat that allows the creation of a slopped surface on both sides of door sills for wheelchair mobility inside your house. You can see this Lego like product in the first photo, which takes about 10 minutes for any homeowner to install. They have a fantastic showroom where you can see many things and actually try them to see if this might be a solution for an accessibility problem in your house; even some that you may have never thought existed. The second photo shows a modification to an existing cabinet. The shelves are put on a track and are lifted up and down by a belt drive, giving a short person, or someone in a wheelchair, access to shelves because the shelves can come right down to the counter top. They even have counter tops that are height adjustable, something great for a family that needs to work at different heights. All the plumbing, including the drains, are flexible and the entire counter, sink and all moves up and down on a mechanized track to keep people working in the kitchen comfortably and safely. Stove tops could be built into such as sink as well. A short wife with a tall husband could find this very practical even though it was originally designed for wheelchair access. Victor really wanted to emphasize that accessibility questions are for different sized people, for elderly, for children as well as for people with handicaps. He also drives home the point that it is relatively easy to make a home accessible and accessibility can be stylish as well. I have always been fascinated with the products that are made for the visually impaired and just love visiting any of the stores maintained by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. They sell a reversible black and white cutting board, so that you can always have a colour contrast between what you are cutting and its background. The last photo above shows a great holder that would allow even a totally blind person to safely and evenly cut vegetables into slices but I gave it to my mother-in-law who has bad arthritis in her hands. The CNIB sells many gadgets that talk, so you don't have to read. They have pill boxes that have a little recorder built into it. Take it to the drug store and have the clerk record the instructions for the pills -- that will prevent medication errors. They have timers that talk and even a scale that tells you how much you weigh, if you want to hear that first thing in the morning.

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