

# Making the Bathroom Easy to Use

The bathroom is one of the most challenging rooms to get around with a wheelchair. There are many ways to modify your bathroom to make the shower, sink and toilet more accessible. The options you have to modify your bathroom are limited by your budget and space.

### Sink and Countertop

Having a sink where a wheelchair can fit under can make using it much easier. Changing your sink or removing cabinets underneath it might be needed. When doing this, make sure that hot pipes under your sink are insulated to prevent burns. A shallow sink with the drain in the rear can be helpful. Lowering countertops also makes the space easier to access.



### Bathtub and Shower

Options for bathing depend on your bathroom space and budget. Your needs also depend on how severe your injury is. For more about bathing and showering, check out the [Spinal Cord Essentials 'Bathing and Showering'](#) handout.

Contact your Occupational Therapist for more information.

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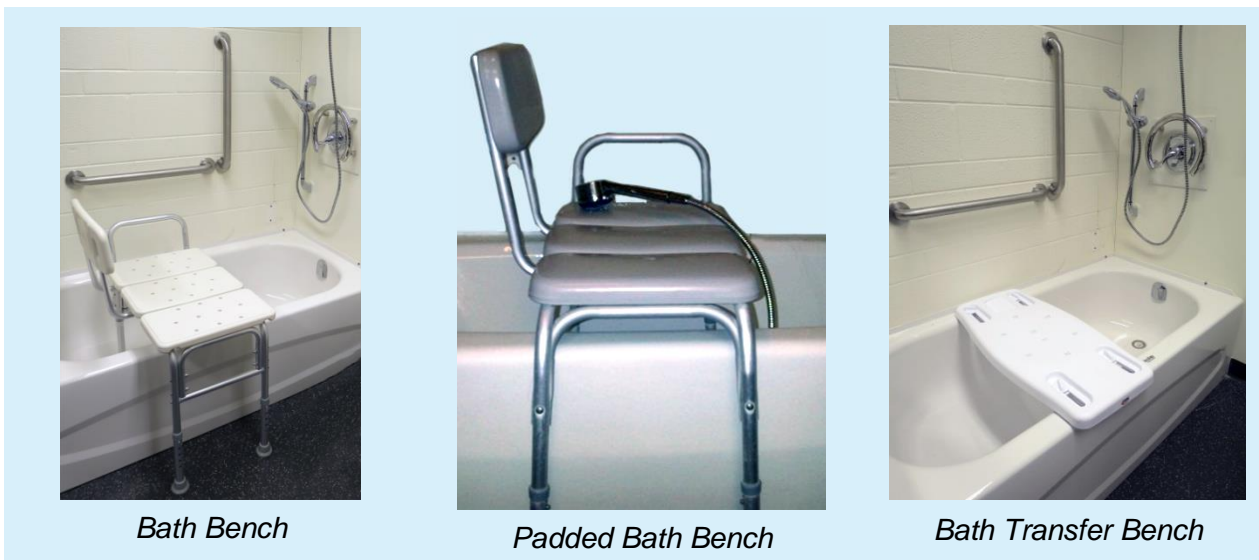
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**Wheel-in shower:** Having a shower where you can wheel in with a wheelchair or commode can make bathing much easier. Showers should have a small slope towards the drain, away from the bathroom floor. This makes the stall little sunken. If you need an attendant to help you shower, the best size for a wheel-in shower is around 1.5 m x 1.5 m (5' x 5'). Smaller sizes may be used but this depends on your equipment needs.



**Bath bench:** Bath benches fit right inside your bathtub or over the side of your bathtub. They help you transfer into the tub. When choosing a bath bench, consider getting one with a seamless padded seat. This helps protect your skin. Using a grab bar installed on your tub can also help with transfers. A non-slip mat at the bottom of the tub can help prevent the bench from slipping.



Systems such as **Shower Buddy** allow you access your bathtub easily. With this system, the bath bench is a track which fits a special seat. The seat itself is part of a commode and can roll onto the track. The system allows the commode seat to slide onto the track and into bathtub. Check out [www.myshowerbuddy.com](http://www.myshowerbuddy.com) for more about this system.

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### Toilet

Equipment can make using the toilet easier. Commodes and raised toilet seats are most often used. Having a higher toilet seat makes it easier to get on and off the toilet. Some commodes can be used both on the toilet and in the shower.

**Raised toilet seats** can be helpful for either transferring or sitting and getting up from the toilet. There are many different types of raised toilet seats.



*Raised seat with armrests*

*Raised seat*

*Raised seat/commode*

**Commodes** can be used over the toilet and in the shower. Wheeling commodes allow you to transfer first and then wheel to the bathroom. Some allow you to wheel by yourself while others are pushed by an assistant. Commodes with four small wheels are pushed by an assistant and have a smaller width. Some models allow you to switch between small wheels for use with an assistant and larger wheels for self-wheeling.



*Commode with tilt*

*Commode without tilt*

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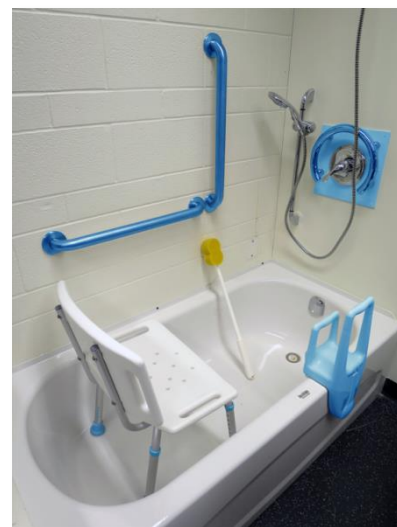
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### Grab bars for transfers

Grab bars can be an important addition to your bathroom. They help support your movements around the bathroom and prevent falls. The most helpful locations for grab bars are around the toilet and in the shower or bathtub.

**Folding grab bars:** These grab bars fold down when you need them. They are helpful when space is limited.

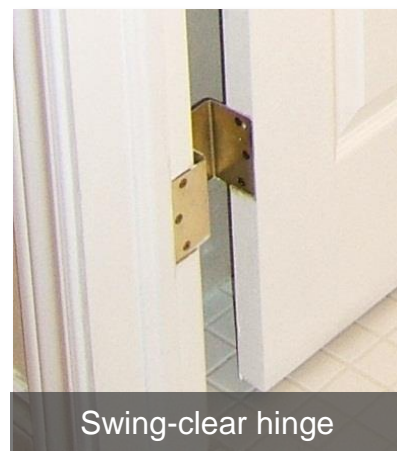
**Reinforced wall:** Most of the time, grab bars need to be installed on a reinforced wall. This means a large plate needs to be installed behind the bar to properly support weight. Installing a grab bar without a reinforced wall can be dangerous since it can be too weak to support your weight. Never grab onto towel racks since they are not strong enough to support your weight.



### Doorways

Your current doorway might not be wide enough for you to enter with your mobility equipment. Doorways should be about 80cm to 90cm (32" to 36") to fit wheelchairs. A doorway can be made larger by replacing the door with a curtain or partition. Some hinges also make the doorway larger. Here are some options:

- Swing-clear hinges make the door about 5cm (2") larger.
- A door can be widened by removing part of the frame.
- Pocket doors save space by sliding into your wall. These doors can be heavier and harder to operate. Also consider that they can get in the way of the some ceiling lift tracks.



Swing-clear hinge

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### Floors

Consider installing a non-slip floor that is easy to clean. Smaller tiles give better grip for both feet and wheels. Other options are high friction flooring or vinyl safety flooring.

### Layout

Light switches and power outlets should be within easy reach. Install them so that they are chest level when seated in your chair. The layout of your bathroom is important to give you enough space to move around. There are rules for helping make your bathroom easy to use with equipment.

- A manual wheelchair needs 1.5m x 1.5m (5' x 5') to turn around.
- A powered wheelchair needs 1.8m x 1.8m (6' x 6') to turn around.

### Storage

Equipment (commodes, benches, catheters, etc...) needs extra storage space. Making extra storage inside or outside your bathroom might be needed. Make sure you can reach your storage areas, they should be around 40cm to 120cm (1.5' to 4') off of the ground.

### What if you can't modify your bathroom

When a bathroom cannot be made accessible, you might have to use other options. Other rooms can be used for bathing, showering, and using the toilet. Consider the following:

- Use a bedpan or a bedside commode with collection pan.
- A sponge bath can be done near any sink.
- Your local fitness centre may have an accessible shower.
- Use a portable shower system to shower in rooms other than your bathroom.

**Tip:** Consider installing slap handles or motion sensor taps. This can make it easier to use the sink.

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