



Aging in the Right Place: Make a plan, but be ready to change it



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Being able to plan far in advance while still retaining the ability to call an audible if necessary is valuable. [iStock]

It's important to recognize that your needs can and likely will change over time

Aging is complicated.

Each week, this column explores a different aspect of that journey with the goal of helping readers age successfully and gracefully — to “age in the right place.”

But your circumstances and your health are uniquely your own, and those circumstances will likely change over time. This is why, according to some aging in place experts, it's important to come up with a comprehensive plan that can be adjusted to changing needs over time. Being adaptable, it turns out, could be one of the most essential qualities when it comes to aging well, because there is no universal approach to aging.

“I wish I could give you a cookie-cutter design or solution that works for everybody and every house, but that's just not the case,” said Richard Acree, certified aging in place specialist and owner of the consulting firm ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Inspections Nationwide. “When looking at aging in place issues, there isn't a universal approach that works for everybody. You have to separate out different groups of people, see what their needs are, and solve those problems on an individual basis.”

While there are plenty of helpful concepts for most people looking to age in place, such as implementing what Acree calls “low-hanging fruit,” or simple devices that go a long way toward improving your home safety, such as grab bars or good lighting, every situation is different, and that means at some point an individual approach is necessary.

And each situation is bound to change, too. Being able to plan far in advance while still retaining the ability to call an audible if necessary is valuable, according to Acree.

“The way to approach it is to keep in mind that everything changes. Just when you think you've got your situation figured out and what you need, your disability could get worse and your needs can change. All of a sudden you need different accommodations to be able to age in place, or maybe aging in place doesn't work for you anymore. That's why it's important to remember that it's a bit of a moving target here. You're working with a snapshot in time,” said Acree.

But that uncertainty shouldn't stop you from making decisions. There are still choices that are likely to benefit your future self in most any situation, such as making sure you have a strong support network nearby or eating healthy, nutritious foods. Looking at homes that are one story or that will be easy to modify are also things that you are likely to benefit from regardless of how much your circumstances change.

The important thing, according to Acree, is to be mindful of all this. Think ahead, be aware of the possibilities and be ready to change plans if necessary.

Find more Aging in the Right Place stories online at heraldtribune.com/aging-in-place. If there are aspects of aging in the right place you would like us to explore, send ideas to mmoore@heraldtribune.com.

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