

# Homes & Living

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## HOW TO HELP PREVENT ELDERLY ISOLATION

by JENNIFER JESSER-RINGER  
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Did you notice any older family members sitting quietly by themselves during the winter holidays this year? There can be a number of reasons for that voluntary isolation. One is that an elderly person is experiencing some hearing loss and cannot fully participate in a conversation. It may be especially difficult for them to follow group discussions or hear in rooms with significant background noise.

The American Academy of Audiology reports that 30 to 35 percent of adults between the ages of 65 and 75 years old have hearing loss. That stat rises to 40 to 50 percent for those 75 and older. The Academy stresses that untreated hearing loss can lead to "sadness, depression, anxiety, paranoia, cognitive decline and poor social relationships."

Jennifer Jesser-Ringer, executive director, Warmus Senior Living Communities, suggests relatives and friends take turns speaking to seniors at family gatherings, talk slowly and look them in the eye. Ask them how they celebrated holidays growing up and tell them about your favorite times, said Jesser-Ringer. Also make sure hearing tests for your loved ones are up to date.

## HOME ELEVATORS

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People are often surprised when Pete Newstrom, vice president of finance and accounting for Arrow Life, tells them his company installed a home elevator for a client who lives in a ranch style home. Why would someone want an elevator in a one-story home?

"It was a ranch with a basement," explained Newstrom, whose company installs residential elevators, stair lifts and other vertical lift devices throughout northeast Ohio. "The client used a wheelchair and although he was able to access the main floor, he wanted access to the basement as well."

Homeowners choose to incorporate elevators in their houses for a number of reasons. The vertical transportation can provide access to parts of a house which would normally be inaccessible to the elderly or those with disabilities. AARP recently released a report showing most people want to stay in their homes as they age and an elevator could help with that wish.

"Unlike a stair lift, which is often removed when a house is sold, an elevator usually stays in place. Even if a buyer doesn't really need an elevator for access to other floors at the time of purchase, he knows one is

already installed. It adds value to a house," said Newstrom. "Also, often times the added value of a home elevator is close to its cost."

Other homeowners opt for home elevators for the luxury, status and convenience. There are many types and styles of home elevators, but those at the highest end can be architectural works of art. Arriving to meet your guests in a glass elevator in the Great Room is certainly a grand entrance.

"When folks are designing their dream home or forever home, it's a common situation to see them include a home elevator. That way they don't have to move in 10, 20, 30 years," said Newstrom.

Ok, but what about the rest of us who are living in homes that qualify as older, smaller stock? Are home elevators completely out of our budgets? People sometimes think home elevators "only cost a few thousands to install, while others think you're always talking six figures," according to Newstrom. But home elevators can range in price from an average \$35,000 to \$100,000 plus, depending on installation costs, operating systems, cab, gates and doors, size, and number of floors it can accommodate, etc.

But here's the thing, says Newstrom: Someone may not hesitate about buying a luxury



A traditional or classic home elevator installed by Arrow Lift. CREDIT: ARROW LIFT



A vacuum-operated home elevator installed by Arrow Lift. CREDIT: ARROW LIFT

car that they will own for only a few years, a backyard inground pool that is used a few times each year, or a top-of-the-line outdoor kitchen that is rarely used four seasons. But installing something that will give you easy access to your entire home 24/7 is priceless, he said.

Home elevators can also be a safety feature, helping to prevent falls and accidents. Safety experts say properly installed and maintained home elevators can be safer than stairs or escalators when considering those dangers.

Newstrom fully acknowledges that taking the stairs instead of a home elevator can be good daily exercise for many

people and is often promoted by health experts. But for the many who can't handle climbing stairs for whatever reason (a broken leg because of skiing, you say?), elevators can often protect you from further injury or discomfort. Over the years, there is less stress on joints and your back will thank you for not trying to move that basket of heavy laundry if you use a home elevator.

Of course, safety is an issue with any home installation of this scale. Three years ago, there was a recall of in-home elevators manufactured by several companies because a space gap between the car and floor could cause entrapment

to children. (The installment of space guards largely corrected the problem.) The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has a list of recalled in-home elevators on its website [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).

Visiting the showroom of an experienced retailer/installer of home elevators can help homeowners understand any safety concerns and also match consumers' needs to this probably once-in-a-lifetime purchase, according to Newstrom. In-home consultations are also usually necessary. Although home elevators generally do

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## Home Elevators

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not take up as much space as most people believe, some homeowners just consider the size of the system's car and not the elevator's total footprint.

Arrow Lift, whose showroom is located in the City of Beachwood, lists five types of home elevators.

- Traditional or classic elevators are the most popular for both accessibility and luxury aesthetics. Requiring a dedicated shaft that runs throughout all the floors of a home, these cable-run home elevators accommodate up to five stops and can carry multiple passengers, wheelchairs and scooters. They are equipped with door interlocks, emergency communication systems, battery backup and emergency brakes.
- Glass elevators can accommodate two to five stops and can be adapted for wheelchair use. These gorgeous systems are focal points in any room and run on chain and counterweight drive systems or a quiet hydraulic system.
- Pitless elevators accommodate two to five stops and are a good choice for retrofit situations and homeowners who don't want or can't have an elevator that requires digging and pouring a pit, even though most pits are only about a foot deep.
- Pneumatic vacuum elevators (PVEs) allow up to five stops, can accommodate up to 525 pounds and up to 50 vertical feet. Cars move between floors in an airtight tube within a bigger, self-supporting tube and use minimal power consumption.

"Sometimes people think the vacuum tube elevators remind them of an elevator in The Jetsons cartoon show," said Newstrom. "So, we have a cardboard cut-out of George Jetson in our showroom display."

- Shaftless elevators work well for home retrofits, older homes and those that can't accommodate a traditional elevator. Accommodating two stops or one story, the elevators require minimum construction, operating on a vertical life system that



moves the car along a rail attached directly to the floor or wall.

Innovations in the elevator industry are often developed first for commercial elevators used in hotels, high rise apartments/condos and office buildings. But some ideas are eventually adapted for home elevators. Some of the latest include: touch free controls (for some elevators you just bend a finger slightly toward a floor number displayed on a panel); fingerprint recognition to operate; and solar-powered systems.

Also, smartphone apps to summon a car; and automatic, sophisticated in-car screen displays (controlled sometimes by AI) to connect instantly with emergency sources and other connections. Mega magnets may be common elevator systems someday. The speed of elevators seems to be always increasing as well, but if you are only going upstairs to bed in your house, this probably isn't a top priority.

"We don't want to go overboard on technology because we don't want people to have to pay for things they don't need," said Newstrom, who added routine maintenance is imperative with home elevators and two inspections a year is usually standard. "But things like technology vary. It's up to the homeowner to decide what is helpful and useful for them."

Sometimes that customization and personalization carries over to elevator aesthetics and appearance, and can lead to even whimsy.

"We once installed a home elevator where the homeowner has a mural of Jack and the Beanstalk painted on the shaft walls. You see it as you go up and down between floors," said Newstrom.

## A BRIEF HISTORY AND FUN FACTS ABOUT RESIDENTIAL ELEVATORS

- Today the top floor units of multi-family buildings, including, of course, the penthouse, usually demand the highest rent and considered the most desirable for residents. But before elevators became common in apartment buildings, the cost was lower for units on the higher floors. That's because climbing the stairs and lugging groceries up a couple flights of stairs is not always fun.
- The first "modern" home elevator was installed in North America in 1929. Because most early elevators (or "ascending rooms" as they were called) were expensive, they were only in mansions. Think chandeliers, mirrors, cushy chairs, red velvet wallpaper or mahogany paneling inside the elevator. (Yes, Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens in Akron has a three-passenger, electric elevator that was installed in 1914. Visitors to the historic home can see the elevator doors in the Tower Stair Hall.)
- C.C. Crispen, owner of C.C. Crispen Motor Car Company, was a pioneer in home elevators. In 1923 he created the Inclinator, more or less a folding wooden chair and footrest that used electricity to move on rollers up and down stairs. He is also credited for designing the Elevette for use on winding staircases.
- Home elevators allow single-family houses, some with three or four floors, to be built on smaller footprints and particularly in dense urban areas. Some newer, multi-story homes built in Cleveland's most trendy neighborhoods, for example, can boast of views of Lake Erie or Downtown Cleveland because home elevators take owners to private rooftop terraces.

## Great reasons to donate unwanted items

People may wonder if they should donate or sell items they no longer use. Of course, some unwanted items can be sold through various channels. However, the benefits of donating merit consideration as individuals ponder what to do with unwanted items taking up space around the house.

- **Save time and stress:** Selling items can take time, and that may be stressful to busy individuals. Donating items is less time-consuming and stressful, and donors won't find themselves waiting around for buyers who fail to arrive on time, if at all.
- **No diminished returns:** It's easy to overestimate how much a particular item is worth. Even if something was a collectible in the family, it might not have much value in the eyes of potential buyers. Holding out for a price that is unattainable may be unrealistic. But donating items clears them out quickly and ensures others can benefit from them.
- **Facilitates a process:** Since selling items can take time, people who tend to hoard items may end up procrastinating even more if they try to sell. If the goal is to clear away clutter, donating is the simplest and quickest means to doing so.
- **Tax implications or benefits:** Those who sell enough items and turn profits may have to claim it on their income taxes. Conversely, donating items comes with potential tax deductions that can help them save money.

Donating unwanted items can have certain perks over selling those same belongings.

- Metro Creative Connection