

Offices in  
Elizabeth City, Portsmouth,  
and Virginia Beach  
Tel: 757-399-7506  
Tel: 252-722-2890  
Fax: 757-397-1267  
Web: [www.oasthook.com](http://www.oasthook.com)



National Academy of  
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Editor  
Sandra L. Smith,  
Certified Elder Law Attorney

## AGING IN PLACE

One of the most common concerns seniors have is whether they will be able to stay in their homes for as long as they want. Most people prefer to age in place rather than to move to a long-term care facility as they get older. There are many financial concerns to consider with aging in place; however, an important and often overlooked consideration is the physical layout and condition of the home. Most homes are currently built for younger individuals who are healthy and mobile. As people age, a home that was suitable for them when they were younger may not be as suitable, making living in the home difficult and uncomfortable. With proper planning and some remodeling, however, they can make their homes comfortable and senior-friendly.

As people age, it is important to have a well-lit home with easy to operate switches, so a general whole-house modification is lighting. Designers suggest equipping many of the lights with dimmers, to make certain that the lighting is at a comfortable level, but may be increased as necessary. Rocking switches can be easier on arthritic fingers than a traditional light switch.

The bathroom can be a major obstacle to staying in one's home. Many seniors suffer from arthritis and joint problems, making movement more limited. This can make getting into a traditional shower or tub difficult. The solution is to modify the bathroom to have a walk-in shower. If possible, the shower should be large enough for two people to sit or stand in comfortably. This will make it easier for a caregiver to assist with bathing if it becomes necessary. The senior may not want to add grab bars at this stage of the remodeling if these bars are not immediately needed, but the senior should reinforce the wall so grab bars could be installed in the future. A temperature regulator should also be installed in the shower or bath, because older skin is less sensitive to heat and can easily be burned.

Flooring is another important design element. If seniors become less mobile, they can easily trip on rugs or have problems walking on carpet. A practical alternative is to install hardwood or laminate flooring that is smooth, easy to

walk on, and reduces the possibility of tripping. Hardwood or laminated flooring is also a practical solution if the occupant needs to use a wheelchair or walker.

Other useful modifications are to use drawers instead of cupboards where possible, raise dishwashers and low cabinets to avoid excessive bending, widen doorways if possible to accommodate a wheelchair, and design an entryway that does not require a step. Many care managers suggest that your home be modified so that you can live on the ground floor if necessary. This may require expanding a half-bathroom to a full bathroom.

Many baby boomers are planning for their future. They are making these home modifications now to plan and prepare for their senior years. The designs and possibilities for these modifications are elegant and attractive; fifty years ago such modifications tended to look institutional and were unattractive. Many manufacturers are developing product lines to meet the demands of seniors. For example, Kohler® has developed their “aging gracefully” concept and has created products that fit into that model.

If staying in your home for as long as possible is an important goal for you, then you should examine your home and make some plans today. You may want to make some modifications now to facilitate your long-term goal.

Oast & Hook now has a life care planner on staff who can assist families with these issues, as well as help coordinate care for clients who need help in their homes. We will highlight our new life care planning practice in a future issue of the *Oast & Hook News*. The attorneys at Oast & Hook can assist clients with their estate, financial, long-term care, insurance, veterans’ benefits and special needs planning issues.

### Ask Allie

O&H: Allie, we’ve heard that extra weight can carry hidden risks for pets. Please tell us about this.

Allie: Sure! A recent article in *HealthyPet* magazine discussed the issue of weight gain in pets. Animals have individual metabolic rates just like people, and they face the same problems of weight gain that people do. Usually weight gain happens when the pet eats too much and does not get enough exercise. Sometimes the pet’s weight issues reflect the health and lifestyle choices that the pet’s owners make in their own lives. Active and athletic people often include their pets when they exercise, but people who don’t exercise may not think about the exercise needs of their pets. Excess weight can lead to a lack of energy, diabetes or heart disease. It can also cause or aggravate arthritis and other joint diseases. Overall, these issues can add up to decreased longevity and lower quality of life. If your pet is overweight, then you and your veterinarian can work on a weight reduction plan to help your pet to lose weight safely. This plan will normally include increasing the amount of exercise that your pet receives, as well as creating the proper diet plan. Getting your pet back in shape may take months, so don’t be discouraged if you don’t see results right away. You are not only helping your pet lose excess weight, you are helping your pet become healthier. Uh-oh, here’s my mom with the laser toy — time for my exercise for the day. See you next week!

### **Announcement**

Oast & Hook will be an exhibitor at the Hampton Department of Social Services Community Resource Expo from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. May 7, 2010, at the Boo Williams Sportsplex located at 5 Armistead Pointe Parkway, Hampton, Virginia 23666. This event is focused on supporting the needs of the elderly and disabled population in the Hampton Roads area, and it is free and open to the public. For more information on other exhibitors at the event, please visit [www.iacrexpo.com](http://www.iacrexpo.com).

### **Distribution of This Newsletter**

Oast & Hook encourages you to share this newsletter with anyone who is interested in issues pertaining to the elderly, the disabled and their advocates. The information in this newsletter may be copied and distributed, without charge and without permission, but with appropriate citation to Oast & Hook, P.C. If you are interested in a free subscription to the *Oast & Hook News*, then please e-mail us at [mail@oasthook.com](mailto:mail@oasthook.com), telephone us at 757-399-7506, or fax us at 757-397-1267.

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