

FURNITURE FOR THE AGING

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What Are the Needs of the Aging?

The needs of the aging can be understood more readily by the five goals considered by them.

1. To live as long as possible or until life's satisfactions no longer outweigh their privations and burdens.
2. To get more rest; to safeguard and protect their energies of a physical existence.
3. To remain active in personal and group roles to avoid complete idleness and indifference.
4. To protect and strengthen long life acquired skills, possessions, rights, authorities, prestige, etc.
5. To withdraw from life, without too much suffering, as honorably as possible.

The needs of the aging, then, of planning furnishings for them is that they must be suitable for these changing needs, yet not look changed for them. The measure of a successful interior is that it function well for them, yet appear to be an interior for adults of any age.

Furniture Requirements

The frequent lack of provisions for furnishings is partially due, not only to the lack of knowledge about specific requirements for the aging, but also to the great variety of products on the market. Since the market in recent years has focused on the young, it is encouraging that the aging situation is coming into focus by the National Association of Furniture Manufacturers. Thus, furniture for the aging has become more attractive, yet functional, rather than the cold metal, "orthopedic" appearance enabling them to maintain mastery of their environment. The general considerations and observations are:

1. The aging spend more time in their home environment than do younger adults.
2. They use their furniture more frequently and for more purposes than younger adults.

3. Features essential to the well-being of the aging are also desirable to the people of all ages.

- ease of maintenance
- safety
- comfort
- mobility
- economy
- pleasing design

Fingertip-controlled power seat to aid in standing and sitting. (Photo courtesy of Ortho-Kinetics Inc., Waukesha, Wisconsin.)



4. The size and shape of furniture should be scaled to the aging person's living space requirements.

Seating

The aging spend much of their time sitting while performing work tasks, conversing, reading, viewing television and resting. Any chair or sofa should fit the person using it. The backs of chairs should be designed to fit the curves of the back. Considerations essential to all chair design are:

1. For health, comfort and the conservation of energy, *body* measurements should be utilized to establish the dimensions and shape of a chair or sofa.

- Seat height related to lower leg length
- Seat depth related to upper leg length
- Seat width related to hip spread
- Shape and angle of chair seat conform to body weight distribution
- Height, curvature and angle of backrest related to curvature and length of spine
- Armrests' position and dimension related to upper arm length

2. The body action of *sitting* is the muscular support of the body weight of the trunk in an upright position with

- Feet on the floor
- No pressure behind the knees
- Support at the lower back but less support at the neck

Sitting action occurs at the hip and knee joints.

- The lower the seat, the greater the flexion
- The height and resilience of the seat and backrest may slow the downward and backward speed of the body
- The height and resilience of armrests aid in slowing down the speed of the body

Rising action is leverage with muscular effort.

- Feet are placed well under the body to aid forward springing action
- Height, depth and tension of the seat affect the ease or difficulty in rising
- The height and length of the armrests affect the leverage needed in rising.

3. The essential *characteristics of chairs* for the aging are:

- Adjustability and flexibility to provide seating for the large or small, short or tall, heavy or lightweight person, changing body needs both forward or backward and upward or downward
- Sturdiness, stability and mobility to give a sense of security and light-weight enough to move for cleaning
- Easy leverage
- Rounded projections, adjustable armrests
- Fireproof and nonallergenic materials
- Stain resistance and easy cleanability

4. The *dimensions* of side chairs vary according to style. The aging sit more erect and further back in side chairs than younger adults for dining, working or writing.

- Front of seat: 15½" to 17" height and rounded
- Seat slant: under ½"
- Seat depth: under 18"
- Chairback: narrower than shoulders — top of back below shoulder blades
- Width: normally 17" - 19"
- Armrests: 18" to 19" apart
- Height of arm: 7" to 7½"

Chair for reading, relaxing and viewing television vary in dimensions, as:

- Front of seat height: 13½" to 15"
- Seat slant: front to back 1½"
- Seat depth: not more than 20", firmness with resilience
- Seat width: wider than side chair
- Chairback: provide a neck rest and extend beyond the width of the shoulders
- Arms: uncurved and high enough and forward enough for good leverage

A rocker or recliner supports the body in the right places which provide relaxation.

- Cane seated rocker with high back satisfactory for comfort and health without front rockers protruding
- Light-scaled models of recliners that tilt with body pressure

Footstools and ottomans for comfort require such dimension, as:

- Height not exceed 12"
- Easily moved
- Heavy or high ones are a safety hazard

Surfaces — Tables and Desks

1. Multi-purpose tables for eating, writing and working serve other purposes for reading, serving, games, hobbies and storing and should have these essentials:

- Sturdiness and stability
- Durability
- Height related to chair seat height
- Leg of table placed in extreme corners
- Edges and corners rounded
- Placed near a window for viewing
- Placed in easy reach of a power outlet
- Desk for writing or storage

2. Occasional or side tables near a chair should be:

- Placed at elbow height for easy reach
- Sturdy but light to move easily
- Surface for lamp, ashtray, books, magazines and recreational materials

Storage

1. Cabinets, chests, bookshelves and wall storage are needed to provide a place for:

- Display and cherished possessions
- Built-in shelves for books
- Closets for clothes
- General outside storage of bulky, seasonal items
- Storage as a means of personalizing their environment more than any other element

2. The essentials of good storage for the aging include:

- Accessibility with shelf height not more than 55"; lowest shelf not less than 16"; and shelf depth not more than 12"



Armless rocker which has multi-use features for tasks. Swing-out drawer may be used for storing sewing articles, medicines, miscellaneous items.

- Visibility of open shelves behind doors; easy visibility by natural or built-in lighting; shallow drawers that glide easily; backs of doors utilized, with peg-board, etc.; and plastic trays with handles and smooth rounded corners

- Flexibility of all shelves adjustable; and storage pieces sturdy but easy to move

- Privacy by having locked drawers or cabinets for money, valuables and personal belongings; and doors on cabinets and closets to operate easily

Sleeping

1. The bed should be located for privacy, separated from living and cooking areas and remain unmade if desired.

2. Considerations for a bed for the aging should include:

- A head board and footboard extending about 12" above a mattress
- A headboard to provide support for the back when sitting in bed
- The top of the mattress 17" to 21" from the floor as related to the length of the legs while sitting and dressing
- A mobile one with castors easily braked from a standing position
- All corners rounded
- Space enough at the headboard and footboard to fold under linens and blankets
- A regular-sized bed or larger

- Adjustable feature for raising or lowering the mattress at both the head and foot

- A place to have a good view and space provided for bedmaking

- A mattress which is tuftless, damp-proof, water resistant, soil- and dust-resistant, flameproof, non-allergenic and easily ventilated

- A bed table or nightstand near with ample surface for individual needs; a lamp with pushbutton switch; height of table 4" to 6" above top of the mattress; easy to move but have castor locks; cantilevered and adjustable height placed over both bed and chair; and revolving storage shelves

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