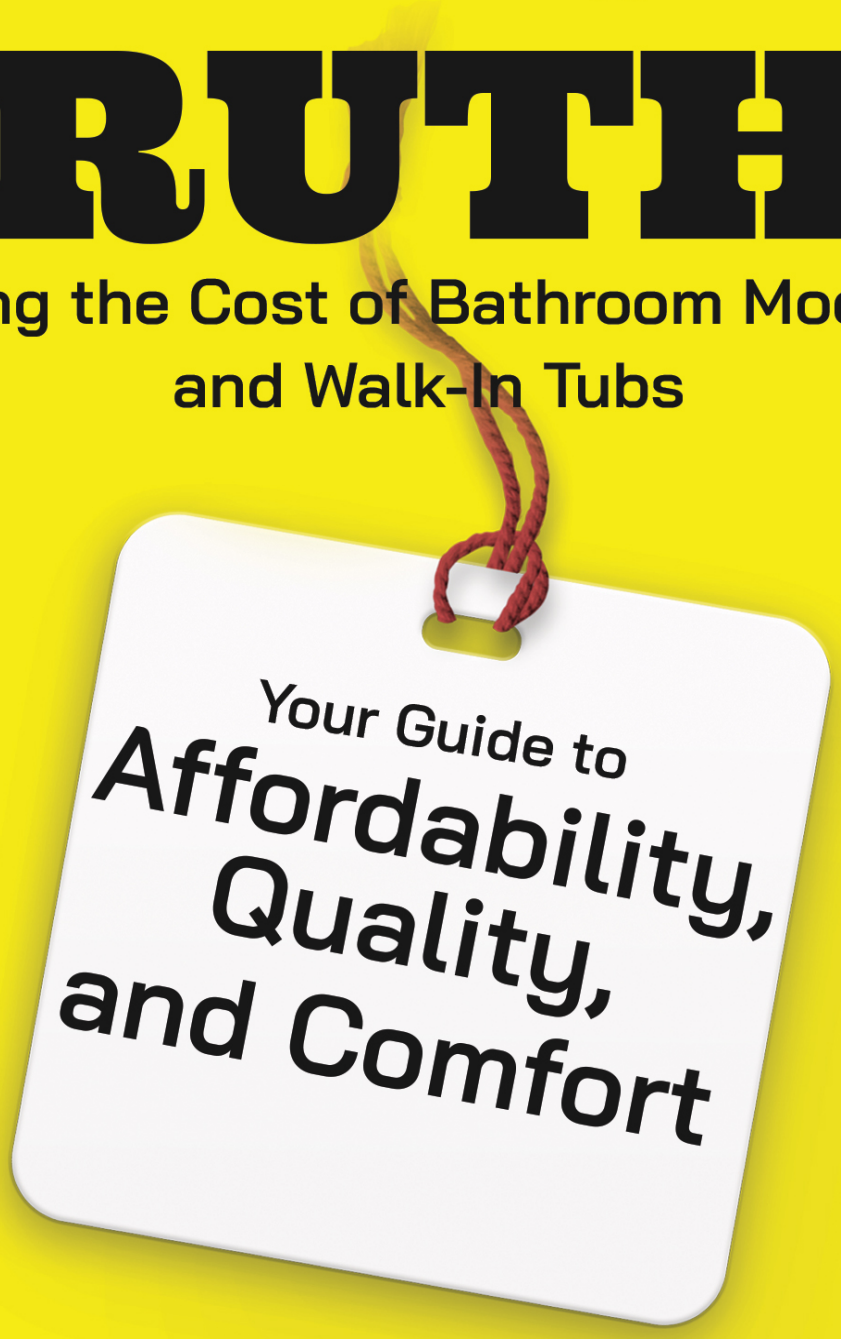
PRICE TAG TRUTHS

Deciphering the Cost of Bathroom Modifications and Walk-In Tubs



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Overview

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Most of Us Make Adaptations to Accommodate Our Bathroom

As we age it becomes vitally important that we are thinking proactively regarding the dangers that exist in our “Jiffy Lube” bathrooms. Often features that we have grown up with and become accustomed to turning dangerous as our strength and flexibility change over life.

I often say that my mother, who was living in the home she was born in, never entered that bathroom expecting it to change to accommodate her. So, she, like millions of others, was changing to try to accommodate her bathroom. It ended up costing her life when she fell and broke her hip.

I have been in the safe aging and senior safety field for nearly two decades. I have interviewed thousands of seniors, baby boomers, their adult children, and caregivers. I can tell you that a vast majority of these individuals are not thinking about the configuration of their bathroom, including specific features and design elements, that often have not changed for centuries.

3 Millennia With Very Little Change – Until Now

The design of bathtubs that are used in our homes today dates back over 3000 years. There has been virtually no modernization or design improvement in these bathing appliances, until now.

Showers by comparison did not even exist until the late 1800s and were not part of our home design and engineering until the advent of indoor plumbing.

This was in the early 1900s. Even though larger and sometimes more luxurious shower designs have evolved, there have been virtually no advancements in bathing technology, safety, and accessibility.

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In this document, I am going to explain how you can pick and choose what safety adjustments you want to make based on your budget.

The truth is that I believe in the future no one is going to bathe by climbing over a sidewall in a bathtub and laying down on the floor to take a bath.

I also don't believe that we will stand in a shower and do what I call the "rain dance" to bathe in a shower. Very dangerous, especially as we age.

Whether someone is 7 years old, 17, 70, or 107, I believe that we will all be using safe bathing appliances, such as walking bathtubs, very shortly.

Almost All Boomers and Seniors Live on a Budget

Keep in mind that virtually every person I work with is either retired or heading to retirement, and they live on a budget to one extent or another. What this means is once an individual begins to acknowledge their concerns and think about making modifications for safety in their bathrooms, many are concerned about the cost.

This dilemma means that many boomers and seniors are instinctively continuing to use their Jiffy Lube bathroom and not being proactive to make changes. Sadly, it often requires that they experience an irreversible accident and/or injury of some sort before they become motivated to make a change. The very real risk is that many of these injuries are serious and life-altering, and never in a good way.

Our Greatest Financial Threat As We Age Is Getting Injured

Also, I have discovered that the greatest threat to our financial and physical security as we age is to suffer an avoidable injury in the bathroom.

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I have learned the hard way that once an injury occurs, it may be too late. Many people I've interviewed have determined that installing a walk-in bathtub (the ultimate safety fixture) is too expensive. I will say this with the highest degree of love and compassion: "If you think you cannot afford a walk-in bathtub, you most definitely cannot afford the financial risk of a serious injury or illness."

For example, my mother was living in the home she was born in when she fell in the bathtub and broke her hip. Being quite healthy, having no significant age-related conditions, when the accident occurred. We know that she quickly recovered from the broken hip.

However, it was all the "iatrogenic" injuries she suffered in the hospital (meaning injuries and illness caused by medical care), that ultimately killed her. She had a stroke from an adverse drug reaction from pain medication. My mom lost 60% of her cognitive abilities due to this avoidable stroke (meaning she now exhibited full-blown dementia). She developed serious infections in the hospital, bed sores, hospital psychosis, and more drug side effects creating a series of heart attacks. These medical traumas led to her deterioration and dying in a nursing home almost exactly a year later.

She Was No Longer "Nanna" And Almost Bankrupt

When Mom was finally released from the hospital, my parents faced over $35,000 in uninsured medical expenses. And... my mom could no longer care for herself. My dad had to bathe her in a traditional bathtub. Very difficult and dangerous... for them both! The cost to make their bathroom safe, even including installing a walk-in bathtub, was a drop in the bucket compared to the expenses her fall-related injury caused. But we did not have this valuable information at that time.

I've encountered many similar disturbing and sad stories such as this. Please understand falling and injuring yourself in the bathroom is not a fluke or an unusual event.

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We have more boomers and seniors dying from bathroom-related injuries today than from automobile accidents (by a multiple of four!). And yet we don't seem to talk about it.

My Dad Was Forced To Face His "Scarcity Mentality"

After my mom passed in the nursing home my dad made it clear he would never go into a nursing home and he wanted me to help him. Helping my dad is how this all got started for me. But I must tell you that my dad was born in 1919, lived through the depression and served in World War II, and raised me with a very strong scarcity mentality.

He did not like to spend money and was especially prone to not spending money on himself. I grew up listening to my dad reject the idea of spending money on himself by saying things such as: "I don't need that", "we can't afford that", "I can do without that", or "I'll just borrow one". He also carried a strong underlying belief that he was not worthy.

If You Are Hesitant To Invest In Your Safety... Why?

You need to stop and reflect... "is my hesitancy to invest in my safety and health being driven in part by a similar scarcity mentality?" Are you deep down thinking "I'm not worthy" of investing funds into my safety?

Also, I have extensive experience introducing these amazing new technologies, such as walk-in bathtubs (which I believe will become the primary way we all bathe in the future without regard to age or disability) to 1,000s of people with serious mobility and health limitations.

I have also been blessed to work with many younger healthier clients who are thinking of their future, and the health benefits they can achieve today using all-natural healing therapies.

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Not to *impress* you, but to *impress* upon you that I know something of what I'm talking about, I am a Licensed General Contractor, a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist, and a Certified Environmental Access Consultant. I have managed the design, product selection, installation, and all construction aspects of 1,000s of these "bathroom accessibility" remodeling projects all over the country for nearly two decades.

Knowledge Is Power

So, I have an experience-based knowledge of the costs involved in these projects. I also know what is good, bad, and borderline when it comes to making the scope of work adjustments or equipment selections to try to meet a budget. We came up with the tagline and registered the trademark: "Call Before You Fall®" because many of these unstable individuals we met would look at one of our walk-in tubs and safe bathing appliances and comment "that's amazing, thank God I don't need that!" and stumble off on their walker.

It was stunning to me to witness the level of denial, and I would say "if they don't need a walk-in tub for safety, then who does? I can only hope they call us before they fall." So, why am I telling you this? I have determined over all these years that many people have a psychological block to being proactive regarding their safety because they have not yet experienced a traumatizing event. Or, for some reason, they have not had reason to identify the fact that they are at great risk in their bathroom.

Inaction Can Be Fatal

I also have come to conclude that many people are like my dad when it comes to investing money. If you are on a fixed income and you don't want to acknowledge that you're at risk in your bathroom, it is much easier to avoid the issue, and just tell yourself you can't afford it. As I say in my new book, "The Joy of Bathing", I can make a bathroom 100 times safer for under $100. Surely you could manage that.

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What I am referring to is the fact that you don't necessarily have to do a designer-level extreme bathroom makeover to greatly increase safety. You don't have to install a walk-in tub to be "safer." But if I'm being honest, I'm going to say that installing a walk-in bathtub is almost always the best "rest of life" investment. As you will see in a moment, the cumulative cost of doing piecemeal modifications can be more expensive, and yet less safe, than the cost to install a quality walk-in tub.

This Guide Is Designed To Help With Your Choices

So... I've created this pricing guide to give you a realistic budgeting guideline to help you evaluate for yourself what changes and safety features you should be doing in your bathroom... right now! Also, it's important to appreciate that you can make these modifications in phases based on your budget. You don't necessarily have to install a full-blown total bathroom remodel with a walk-in bathtub with all the therapies as a first step. You can put the tub in first, then work toward the rest of the bathroom, assuming your budget is tight.
Or, you can take "baby steps" and start with a few basics. You have a choice.

Small Payments Often Help

Also, it is not my place to sell financing, and I don't. However, many people need to do something and require a monthly payment to make that happen. Financing may be a way to make your safe bathroom project happen sooner rather than later. If your budget is $8,000 and you can make a $13,000 walk-in tub project happen by financing $5,000 at $75 a month, then maybe you should consider it.
Or if you have no cash, 100% financing can also help you get your project done, often for as little as $250 per month.

We have access to the same financing that other contractors have. But rather than forcing "dealer financing" products on our clients, we offer curated submissions to 17 banks that will each offer a loan based on your desired monthly payment.

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Or, if you want true 0% options, we have 13 credit card companies that will offer 0% for a fixed number of months based on your credit score. This keeps you in control.

Sometimes We Need To Rip The Band-Aid Off

However, with that said, I will tell you that the phased approach (while allowing you to space out your investment) keeps you at greater risk for a more extended period. Every day is another day in which an avoidable accident can change it all. This approach very well may end up costing you significantly more in the long run, versus doing the modifications to install a walk-in tub or safe bathing appliance all at once.

Realistic Costs Plus Pros and Cons

So, I'm going to start with the least expensive options and I'm also going to provide you with a realistic cost range for having these modifications professionally performed for you. I will also provide some basic “Pros” and “Cons” for each. Keep in mind that without access to a certified aging-in-place specialist and/or a trustworthy bathroom remodeler, you may not get the equipment or installation services that will accomplish your goal and meet the ADA guidelines.

I am always available to consult with you on these issues and will help you make your decisions if you want. Also, I have many FREE videos and resources that I have created for you, and you can access them at your leisure. Also, keep in mind that pricing can vary based on your location, labor rates in your area, and the unique features of your home. But the numbers I am providing you are very realistic, and the ranges are there to give you options and food for thought.

I will also offer you a little bit of discussion as to why these various modifications may or may not be appropriate for you. My objective is to do as much as I possibly can to put you in control of your aging at home and your safety to the greatest extent possible. I also want you to know that we are always here and willing to help and answer questions in any way we can.

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BUDGET-DRIVEN BATHROOM SAFETY OPTIONS

So, I will start with the least expensive and sometimes the most important modifications and work my way up to the most expensive. Keep in mind that you can cut and paste and mix and match whatever modifications best meet your budget and safety needs.

1. GRAB BARS

These inexpensive safety devices can be a major improvement and overall safety in your bathroom and they're not particularly expensive. I often say: “towel bars should be outlawed.” This is because towel bars are generally located in your primary pathway as you navigate around your bathroom.

These towel-holding devices are in no way intended to support an individual who is unstable or falling. However, it is normal human instinct to grab at anything available if we feel like we are going to fall. The fact remains that to grab on to something that is not capable of supporting you sets you up for a greater risk of injury when it fails.

So, step one in my thinking would be to remove all towel bars and then assess where you need additional stabilization throughout your entire bathing process. Then install ADA-compliant grab bars in those locations. If you cannot afford that, at least replace the primary towel bar you use with an ADA-compliant grab bar. This $100 investment will make your bathroom 100x safer. Towel bars are the number one feature in existing bathrooms that cause serious injury.

PROS: Inexpensive, easy to buy, relatively easy to install, many designs and shapes, can be located where needed, add significant fall protection.
CONS: Partial solution, must be installed properly, must be located properly.

Purchase and install ADA grab bar in tub/shower area — **$100-$250/ea**

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2. NON-SLIP SURFACES

Many surfaces in and around your “Jiffy Lube” bathroom are slippery. This is especially true when water is present, and hands and feet are wet. Please know that the floor of your tub or shower needs to have a high enough non-slip coefficient to protect you from slipping.

This risk is significantly increased in the area I refer to as the “landing zone”. This is the floor surface immediately outside the bathtub or shower that your feet must land on for you to exit. Since your momentum is moving forward, and everything is wet, the landing zone is where many slips originate. Often you will see floor mats outside the tub or shower, or in other areas of the bathroom. But we want to avoid floor mats, as they can slip, or create a trip hazard. So, creating a non-slip surface that is your floor surface material is an important objective.

Of course, you can invest in replacing the entire bathroom flooring and shower floor with non-slip material, but that is going to be a more expensive approach. This is covered in subsequent sections. There are materials, applications, and coatings that we can apply to the floor of the tub, shower, or landing zone for very little investment.

PROS: Can be inexpensive, easy to do, wide range of options

CONS: Requires proper option selection, requires proper location selection, can be relatively expensive, may not lead to whole bathroom non-slip flooring solution

Apply non-slip strips or tape to the tub/shower floor and landing areas — $25-$100

Apply non-slip roll-on material to tub/shower floor and landing areas/bathroom — $200-$1,000

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3. PERMANENTLY INSTALLED TOILETRY FIXTURES

Many bathrooms have soap dishes, towel bars, and toilet paper holders that are installed within the tile work. Many people will, by necessity, rely on these to help them get up and down. This is very unsafe as these fixtures are merely glued into place like a piece of tile. Replace with suction mounted or permanent bolted-in-place solutions or accessory solutions. Suction and non-permanent solutions must be located to avoid being used for support.

PROS: Suction and movable options are inexpensive, many options are easily relocated, remove the risk of relying on the insecure fixture, and offer options on location and access.

CONS: Permanent solutions are fairly expensive, and will require professional location and installation. Suction solutions can fail.

Remove insecure soap dish/towel/toiletry storage and replace with surface mounted and repair — **$75-$200/ea**

Remove insecure soap dish/towel/toiletry storage and replace it with permanent bolted fixtures — **$200-$500/ea**

4. NON-ADA COMPLAINT LEVERS AND HANDLES

The ADA requires that all faucets and operating handles be levers that don't require a grip to operate. The ADA also requires that valves are at full flow in ¼ turn. To be ADA compliant, the pressure to operate cannot be more than 5 lbs. Most older faucets, and many newer ones, don't meet this requirement.

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PROS: inexpensive (if can find suitable replacements that fit existing faucets), valve replacement addresses all ADA issues.

CONS: may be hard to find suitable replacements, does not address other non-ADA compliant valve functions, more expensive to replace valves.

Replace non-ADA valve handles with ADA lever handles (handles only) — **$75-$200/ea**

Replace an entire valve with ADA complaint valve — **$750-$2,000/ea**

5. INSTALL SELF-BATHING AND CAREGIVER FIXTURES

As we age, managing hot and cold valves, diverting to shower heads, and other factors make self-bathing and even assisted bathing more difficult. We need to have shower wands with long enough hoses, as well as spray adjustments and shut-off features that are designed for these purposes.

PROS: Makes self-bathing and caregiving much easier, allows better water flow control, helps increase the length of time one can stay at home, and reduces the stress of bathing.

CONS: Requires existing shower head, or faucet adapter, which may eliminate water spray options.

Replace the fixed shower head with ADA removable wand and hose. — **$150-$950**

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6. STRUCTURALLY SUPPORTIVE OR SAFE WATER SPLASH CONTROL

Most shower curtains and shower doors are not engineered to support a human body in the event of a fall or loss of balance. One of the most frequent problems is the loss of balance and visual distraction that occurs when you need to pull and jerk on the curtain to get the rings to open. This distraction often leads to becoming off balance and at risk of falling. The ADA requires that we have curtain rods that are easy glide track systems that do not snag or become difficult to operate. Think of the curtains used in hospitals to divide areas. They have an easy glide track, and you should have them too. Keep in mind, that no curtain rod is intended to support full body weight.

PROS: Removes much of the risk of opening and closing a shower curtain, provides slightly more support in an emergency and can be shaped to fit any tub/shower.

CONS: Does not eliminate visual barriers or distractions, and does not remove the risk of exiting the tub/shower.

Replace non-supportive shower curtain rod with ADA glide track **$75-$250**

7. DANGEROUS SHOWER DOORS

Shower doors are notoriously dangerous. If you are not modifying your entire bathroom, there is little you can do. Please be aware of the space restrictions caused by your current doors. Most only provide 24” or less of pass-through space. Consider if there is a more accessible option. Consider an easy glide curtain system as an alternative.

PROS: Increases ease of entry and exit, which may result in greater access

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CONS: Does not eliminate the risk of glass, may not provide sufficient water control and can be fairly expensive.

Replace glass shower doors with panel or open access **$700-1,900**

8. NO SAFE PLACE TO SIT WHILE BATHING

Instability, vertigo, and weaker legs make standing in the tub or shower to bathe very riskily. Bathing in a seated position greatly reduces risk. This is a major reason that walk-in tubs are so valuable. The seat is integrated into a deep soaking tub with high side walls. You can't fall in, and you can't fall out.

So, a portable bench is the cheapest way to address this. However, portable means movable, and many problems stem from a bench that can move, whether in a tub or a shower.
There are also several options relative to the type of bench. Portable, wall mounted or integrated. Again, integrated is by far the safer option.

PROS: several options, can be inexpensive, make entry/exit safer, and helps with the bathing process.

CONS: may not remove instability risk (portable bench), risk of seating continues, can be expensive (integrated bench), and may not be enough room for safe use.

Install portable bench in tub or shower **$75-$350**

Install wall mounted fold down bench **$250-$1,200**

Install integrated tiled bench in shower **$750-$1,200**

9. ELIMINATE HIGH SIDE WALL TO BATH

If climbing over the sidewall of a tub is your primary issue, we can do what is called a tub cut. We remove a section of the sidewall and turn your bathtub into a shower. Remember, you will still need to add in a bench and water splash protection.

PROS: Makes access easier, and less expensive.

CONS: Lose the ability to bathe, still requires bench, curtain, and shower modifications.

Install tub-cut to remove high side wall to bathtub **$1,000-$3,000**

10. INSTALL CUSTOM AND LOCATION-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

Many aspects of maneuvering in your bathroom require unique support systems. Maybe a fold-down grab bar next to the toilet, or a super pole that will allow you to pivot into the shower, or brace you as you climb into the tub. They may help get you in, but will not help to get you up off the floor of a tub. Just keep this in mind if you are considering these fixtures.

PROS: Allows personalized support placement, many options, and designs, provides full bathroom coverage, relatively inexpensive.

CONS: Requires professional installation, requires personalized needs assessment, and can be fairly expensive.

Install super pole or toilet grab bar system outside tub or shower **$750-$1,200/ea**

11. REPLACE NON-ADA TUB/SHOWER VALVES

Many existing tub/shower valves are not ADA-compliant. Many do not meet any of the ADA guidelines for ease of grip, ease of operation, and full flow in ¼ turn. Also, most do not offer any thermostatic protection.

You should use the shower and tub/shower combo valves that offer separate temperature adjustment and single lever flow control (NOTE: THIS DOES NOT MEAN THE COMMON VALVE THAT COMBINES FLOW AND TEMPERATURE MIXING IN A SINGLE MOTION).

You should always consider a type “T” thermostatic valve or at least a type “P” pressure balance valve. Type “T” is by far the safer choice and truly protects from scald. You may want or need to install a separate valve from the TMV.

PROS: Eliminates need to mix hot and cold, keeps desired temperature set, prevents accidental scald.

CONS: Expensive, must be professionally installed, requires informed selection.

Install ADA a type “T” Thermostatic shower valve **$1,500-$2,950**

Install ADA pressure balance shower valve **$750-$2,000**

12. CONVERT BATHTUB TO SHOWER OR REMODEL SHOWER AREA

A very popular trend right now to get rid of the bathtub is to convert the tub into a shower. This eliminates the need to climb over a bathtub side wall and offers an easier transition to a shower. Also, this price category can include installing a preformed shower pan or upgrading to a custom zero threshold or accessible shower pans.

PROS: Removes issues of entering/exiting the bathtub, provides a new look to the entire surround, can install ADA valves, etc, easy fast install offers the option to upgrade to tile the ver pan.

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CONS: Eliminates ability to bathe and do therapies, dangers of showers remain, most include use of cheap acrylic shower pans, plastic wall panels and cheap valves, issues with safe water control remain.

Convert a bathtub to a pre-formed shower pan and new wall overlay — $9,000-$13,000

Upgrading to a tile over zero thresholds shower system — $12,000-$23,000

13. INSTALL ENTRY-LEVEL WALK-IN TUB INSTALLATION

You do not need to purchase a pre-packaged, fully loaded (all kinds of therapy systems and extra). You can select a basic walk-in bath with a few add-ons, and you can choose a simplified installation. For example, we do many walk-in tub projects for Medicaid, where the lowest price is often the most significant factor. If price is the most important factor, the right company will help you to minimize costs. Having access to virtually every manufacturer of walk-in tubs means we can help you identify the best option at a price that will work for you. Often this price is equal to or lower than a combination of several of the above modifications. of course, the range is impacted by your specific construction needs.

PROS: Provides all safety and soaking ability, permits use of soaking therapies and salts, minimizes investment, and provides a rest-of-life solution.

CONS: Does not provide all ADA safety features, no access to therapy systems, and may not include the best installation.

Install basic walk-in tub with no therapy and slide-in install — $8,000-$13,000

Average $11,000

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14. INSTALL TOP OF A LINE WALK-IN TUB WITH ALL APPROPRIATE THERAPIES

This is the ultimate in terms of bathroom safety and high-quality walk-in or easy-access therapy tubs. The range in the budget is a function of exactly which therapies you most benefit from, and which appliance you need.

Also, the scope of work can range based on your bathroom, and desired modifications. Generally speaking, this price level includes everything relating to the tub and therapies, installation of the studs, plumbing, tile, and new surround. It also includes widening a bathroom door for better access, if needed.

PROS: highest quality appliance and installation, installed to the studs with tile flange, high-level ADA complaint valve options, thermostatic protection, independent bathing, and caregiver design, all appropriate therapies, rapid fill and drain features, option to re-do entire surround.

CONS: higher investment level, may take longer for the tub to be built, slightly longer installation time.

Install high-quality walk-in or transition tub with Medical Hydrotherapy

$10,000-$20,000

Average $14,500

15. ADA EXTREME BATHROOM MAKEOVER

If you want to completely redo your bathroom, walk-in tub, new surround, flooring, vanity, toilet, lighting, paint, etc, this is your budget level. This includes high-end fixtures, finishes, and workmanship. It could also include remodeling both an existing shower and walk-in tub installation depending on the bathroom.

PROS: Entire bathroom redesign with state-of-the-art finishes, all new fixtures (tub, toilet, vanity), flooring, grab bars, door widening, full ADA compliance, many budget-driven options, a true spa, and an in-home healing center.

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CONS: Most expensive, requires professional contractor, longer completion schedule, requires customer option selections and involvement in design.

Whole bathroom ADA extreme make-over **$18,000-$40,000**

CONCLUSION

So, there you have it. A detailed list of virtually every modification you might want to consider to make your bathroom safer. I always encourage you to think in terms of the rest of your life. If you are living in the home you want to stay in and you accept the fact that you are, or will, face age-related and degenerative health conditions, doing something to make your bathroom safer and healthier is a necessity and not a luxury.

I encourage you to be proactive and think ahead. I also encourage you to factor in the financial realities of your situation so that we can hopefully work together to create the very best, even perfect solution, for you.

Please contact us with any questions and we will do our best to help give you the information that you need without trying to sell you on something you neither want nor need.

I love questions. Hang in there and reach out to discuss your desires. You can click here to book a time on my schedule at https://calendly.com/perfect-fit-consult/45min or call my office to schedule a time at 800-688-0055.

If you prefer email, you can reach me at Info@BentleyBaths.com.

I am here to help.

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