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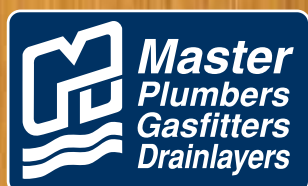


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*Acceptable solution to AS/NZS 4121 in Auckland and Wellington on condition that stall size is increased to give required turning space for wheelchair.

**Only available on the Caroma Care 800 range from October 2011.

bathroom beauties

Convenient, easy to clean, and space saving ... what's not to like about wet area bathrooms? By John Jurman and Diana Noonan

GET SOUND ADVICE!

Talk to your Registered Master Builder and Master Plumber when planning your wet area bathroom project. They can assist with any necessary permits, and ensure a quality result.

Once found only in institutions, 'walk in' wet area bathrooms are becoming a design feature in new homes and modifications of older bathrooms.

Recognising the looming spending power of ageing Baby Boomers, housing companies are designing units, apartments, and one level homes for the growing market of older people for whom safety and style are of equal importance.

And for those who already need the space and convenience of wet area bathrooms for mobility reasons, there are wonderful choices for wall and floor coverings, fittings, grab rails and other disability accessories.

These days most manufacturers of toilets, basins, taps, vinyl, tiles, and hardware for 'the little room' have options tailored for older people and those with accessibility requirements.

We hope our special feature inspires readers whose bathrooms need to be built or modified to accommodate disabilities. You may even qualify for public funding (see our advice box on page 54)!

What goes where?

As with any home renovation or design project, it pays to think carefully about the right layout for your needs.

Consider the best positions for the toilet, basin, taps, shower, grab rails, doors, storage units, drains, and small but important details such as the toothbrush and loo roll holder.

Even if you don't currently use a wheelchair or walking stick or frame, it doesn't hurt to install wide doorways and knobs or handles that don't require deft hand movements to open.

Keep storage areas for towels and grooming aids, and any power outlets and basin or shower taps, within easy reach.

Seek advice from your local building and plumbing suppliers, your area's Disability Information Centre, and specialists such as an occupational therapist when planning your wet area bathroom. >



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Shower power

Satinjet

High-pressure showers aren't for everyone. If you have sensitive or easily damaged skin, water delivered at high pressure can leave you feeling as though you've been pelted by hail!

Shower technology like Methven's Satinjet has been designed to protect elderly and sensitive skin.

Regular showers have single jets that can feel as sharp as needles.

Satinjet showers deliver water in twin jets that collide with each other and turn into thousands of tiny, gentle droplets by the time they reach your skin. The technology also uses lower water flows, which saves hot water.



My oh Maia!

Chlorine in water can dry out your skin and hair (not what you want if you have sensitive skin).

Methven's Maia shower incorporates its Satinjet technology and uses Vitamin C cartridges, a soothing 'feel good' choice for anyone who has eczema or dermatitis, or whose skin is irritated by the chlorine often found in city water.



Safety first

Those who find it hard to reach for shower temperature controls should ask their local bathroom supplier about fittings that automatically monitor and adjust water temperature.

It's no fun to be enjoying a shower when, suddenly, another member of the household turns on the hot tap in the kitchen or, worse, you're scalded when the cold water supply is used by someone else. Methven's mixer technology anticipates temperature changes so you don't have to do a thing. In the event of a cold water supply failure, the thermostat automatically shuts off the hot water supply.

Visit Methven's website to learn about its shower products, www.methven.com



PHOTO: JDEMAST, ISTOCKPHOTO

Brilliant basins

Wet area bathrooms are designed for ease of use, so it makes sense to install fixtures that everyone can use. For basins, think about the depth and width that will work best in your household. These days many models are wall or countertop mounted, allowing access for wheelchairs. Keep in mind the need for flat bench areas with plenty of space for easy access to items such as a hair dryer, cosmetics, toothbrushes, hair brushes and combs. All of the items should be handy so those who use walking frames or sticks and wheelchairs (or those who are a bit wobbly on their feet) don't have to bend or strain, or risk falls.

Grab rails

These are a safety must in many showers and bathrooms. Ask your local Disability Information Centre or occupational therapist for advice, or view the options offered by companies like Heirloom which include 'care assisted' modular grab rails. These have various grip finishes, and some are even impregnated with an antibacterial compound. They can be assembled into any shape to fit your personal requirements and bathroom layout. Heirloom also supplies a shower slide which comes attached to a grab rail, a handy safety feature which takes up little space.

Lovely loos!

The current trend in toilet design favours those with special mobility needs. Most toilet cisterns were once mounted on the wall above the pan (making it difficult for those not standing to reach the flush button); now they're often mounted directly onto the back of the pan. If you're installing a new toilet suite, ask about models with buttons that operate with the lightest push, or even a nudge of your elbow. Elevated 'overheight' toilet models will make transfers on and off the toilet easier; ask your local bathroom supplier about available models. Warm water bidets are also available for easy attachment to your existing toilet; instead of using loo paper or wipes, these devices will wash and even dry your bottom! Bidet devices come with many features and are becoming a popular bathroom fitting in New Zealand.



Staying warm

A warm bathroom appeals to everyone, but when showering and dressing can be a drawn-out process, you don't want to be left shivering! Warmup NZ, an Auckland company, recommends underfloor heating for wet area bathrooms, and infrared heaters which deliver instant warmth. Because these heaters target objects (such as people) rather than just heating the air, they are also cost effective.

Top taps!

When thinking about taps in the bathroom, for those with a weak grip, taps with ceramic washers can be easier to turn on and off than those with regular washers. And 'lever taps' are easier to manage than standard varieties. Ask your local bathroom supplier about taps that are specially designed with arthritic fingers in mind, and can be used even with a closed hand. Though they're at the higher end of the price bracket, they may be exactly what you're looking for. il bagno of Auckland has tap ware featuring tall lever handles for ease of use. Phone 09 307 0914 or visit www.ilbagno.co.nz



Wet area vinyl needs to be professionally laid by an installer who is thoroughly familiar with wet area building stipulations.

If tiles are your preference, you will be able to find many nonslip options for wet area showers and bathrooms.

Your local tiling retailer will allow you to take samples home to try (a small, often refundable charge may apply).

Safe seating

Many elderly and disabled people need to sit while showering or bathing. There are many seating options: stools, foldaway seats, benches, special bariatric models for larger people, even hoists and lifts for those who need help to take a bath.

It pays to get advice from an occupational therapist or seating specialist before choosing these products.

You could also visit your local Disability Information Centre, which can show you available models and help to assess your needs. Visit www.nzfdic.org.nz to find your nearest Centre.

When choosing bathroom seating, consider the weight it will need to bear and whether your chair should have a back and/or arms (good for those whose balance is unpredictable). How stable do you need the seat to be – would it be easiest if it was fixed to the wall of your shower, or do you need a height-adjustable seat?

Chairs with drainage holes on the seats can catch skin and hair, with painful results! Test the seats you like before you buy.

If more than one person in your home is using the shower, think carefully about how the seat can be removed or stowed away when you're not using it.

Standalone stools and seats range from under \$100 to many hundreds, depending on the model.

Heirloom offers a robust stainless steel foldaway seat (\$580) which measures 800 X 450mm. If you're looking for something smaller, Heirloom's compact 360 X 360mm foldaway seat fits onto the shower wall, and costs around \$165.

If a shower stool will suffice for your needs, Heirloom offers one at \$165.

Heirloom products are available in a wide range of stores including Placemakers, Plumbing World, Carters, and Mitre 10 (see www.heirloom.co.nz).

Funding may be available for this kind of equipment.

Talk to your GP or occupational therapist about funding for aids to keep you safe in the bathroom. >



Flooring

When it comes to wet area floor surfaces, nonslip tiles or vinyl are typically used. If you prefer tiles, be aware that this type of floor surface may not be eligible for publicly funded bathroom modifications.

Bathroom Solutions, a Wellington company with a long history of installing wet area bathrooms, recommends Granite Safe T nonslip vinyl. Used in both residential and commercial bathrooms, the vinyl is a generous two metres wide and available in many colours. Tough, attractive, easy to clean, it's likely to last a lifetime. Talk to your local flooring specialist about Granite Safe T vinyl and other brands suitable for a wet area bathroom.

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Expert advice!

Otaki's Graham Booth has been building and adapting wet area bathrooms since the 1970s, when he began to help disabled and elderly people create 'walk-in showers' so they could continue living in their own homes.

Back then few other builders took much interest in bathrooms with anti-slip surfaces and wet area showers, but Graham became an expert, to a point that he wrote a book, *Construction Of A Wet Area Shower*, which has been in print ever since.

Graham sells the book to those planning a wet area bathroom as part of a home modification after developing disabilities, or creation of a bathroom in new builds by those who want a safe, modern, easily cleaned bathroom.

Graham, now 72 and retired, says it's important to make wet area bathrooms big enough for wheelchairs and support assistance.

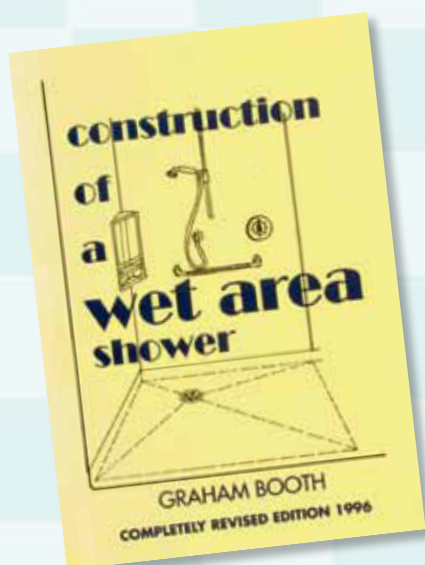
"Don't settle for a poky space, especially in the sloping shower area. Go for a generous sized area so there is room for people and equipment, and so water can flow away quickly and doesn't pool in corners."

His book provides floor plans for alterations to bathroom designs commonly used in older New Zealand homes.

You can buy *Construction Of A Wet Area Shower* by posting \$10 to PO Box 15014, Otaki 5543.

The price includes postage, and you can buy two books for just \$15 inclusive.

We thank Graham for giving us permission to reproduce advice from his book about how to plan and construct a wet area shower.



What is a wet area shower?

In a wet area bathroom, there is no cubicle or separate tray.

Instead, the shower floor slopes into a floor drain.

The shower area is isolated from the rest of the bathroom only by a curtain or glass partition.

This construction method has been developed to produce a satisfactory wet area shower in the typical New Zealand house with a suspended wooden floor.

The end product is a custom built shower tray floored with tiles or vinyl.

A wet area shower costs no more to construct than a standard shower cubicle. If carefully constructed it is totally waterproof, looks good, works well, and will not crack with movement. The method can also be adapted for use where a house has a concrete slab floor.

Why make a wet area shower?

One of the best ways of providing an accessible bathroom with a minimum of alteration is to incorporate a 'wet area' or 'wheel-in' shower. This has a number of advantages. The shower will be completely accessible, with no step to negotiate at all. No floor space is taken up when the shower is not in use; the whole area is available for wheelchairs and people to move around. Replacing a bath with a wet area shower often provides sufficient extra space for a toilet. In a wet area shower, a carer or supporter can stand on either side of the shower area ... or there is space for two supporters. The whole bathroom/shower area is very easy to keep clean. Often anti-slip vinyl is used over the whole bathroom floor area, so it is much safer to walk on than other kinds of bathroom flooring, such as shiny tiles.

PLANNING YOUR WET AREA BATHROOM



Area of floor needed

A minimum sloping area of 1200 x 1200mm is needed for standing, or sitting on a freestanding or wall-hung shower seat. Those who need assistance in the shower in a commode chair may need a longer area, say 1200 x 1400mm or 1200 x 1500mm. One dimension may be a little less than the 1200mm but the minimum size of the showering area needs to be 900 x 1000mm.



Positioning the shower in the room

Keep the shower as far away from the doorway as possible. If there is sufficient room, keep the shower area clear of access routes to the basin area and the toilet (especially if several people use the bathroom) to avoid walking across a wet floor.



Sloping the floor

Care must be taken in sloping the floor so water can get away as quickly as possible, while keeping the slope to a minimum. It is advisable to slope the floor four ways

towards the drain, which will avoid water pooling against a wall or in a corner. A total fall of about 20 - 25mm, measured from the perimeter of the reconstructed floor area to the centre of the drain, is sufficient. In some situations, the room may already slope towards a corner or one wall, perhaps because subsidence has occurred. Be sure to compensate for this!



Positioning the floor drain or trap

It is better to position the drain closer to the internal corner of the shower area, about 350 - 500mm from the walls. This is central to where most showering takes place and helps to keep water away from the flat vinyl or tiled areas.



Positioning a curtain track

Plan to have the curtain track about 200mm inside the perimeter of the sloping area. A curtained area of up to 1000 x 1200mm is usually convenient. If any larger, the curtain cannot be reached from a sitting position. If the shower includes a window, a J shaped curtain track can be used so that the curtain screens or avoids the window.



Shower controls and shower rose

Shower controls and sliding shower fittings should be positioned to suit the proposed sitting or standing positions of the users. A convenient height for the controls for a sitting or standing position is about 1000mm from the floor (builders and plumbers should decide the actual positions on site with the user and an occupational therapist). For standing use, it's preferable to be able to direct the shower rose at least partially towards a wall rather than at the shower curtain, to avoid flooding and scalding.



Grab rails

Always decide on the positioning of grab rails with the user present; 50mm or so either way can make all the difference for the user. Determine approximate positioning of grab rails with advice from an OT if possible, before the walls are lined, and provide generous fixing so that the accurate position can be finalised once all the work is finished. Good quality stainless steel grab rails are the safest and the longest lasting option (they can also be the most costly). ➤

PHOTO: TSERKIMSTER/ISTOCKPHOTO

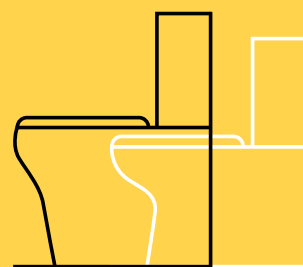
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Affordable prevention

Damp bathrooms cost Kiwis millions of dollars a year: thousands of dollars, on average, for individual repairs.

Aquatite's Wetwall Caddy is a Kiwi invention that will protect wall cavities from potential leaks which, if they go unnoticed, can rot out bathroom walls. The Aquatite device provides a seal between wall




linings and the wall cavity, trapping any moisture and diverting it harmlessly down the face of the wall. Home owners are soon alerted that they have a leak, which might otherwise go undetected for years, when the damage has already been done.

The affordable Aquatite device hides around the shower taps, and is built into the wall.

The idea for the Aquatite Wetwall Caddy came after seeing the amazing amount of damage caused by water leaking from mixers and taps, says inventor Chris Withers.

"With the huge cost involved and the serious skin and respiratory diseases that black mould can cause, our goal was to design a unit that would eliminate the problem altogether."

To learn about the Wetwall Caddy and other Aquatite products, visit www.aquatite.com or phone 0508 427 828. 



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FUNDING FOR ESSENTIAL MODIFICATIONS

If your disability is likely to continue for more than 6 months and will result in your requiring ongoing support, it's possible that you may be eligible for funding assistance for your bathroom modification.

1. You'll be assessed by a 'specialist assessor' (this may be an OT who visits your home). They will manage your case through the funding process.
2. If your disability is the result of an injury or accident, an ACC case manager will assist with decisions about what is required. Any funded modification of your bathroom must be considered 'essential'.
3. Where other options exist or where you can make do with your bathroom as it is, funding won't be available.
4. Any funded modification of your bathroom must be cost-effective and specific to your needs. This doesn't necessarily mean you'll receive the least expensive option.
5. With funding, the emphasis is on allowing you to return to or keep living in your own home.
6. If you do receive funding to modify your bathroom, it pays to think long-term. Only in special circumstances will public funding be granted a second time.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

www.caroma.co.nz
www.chesters.co.nz
www.heirloom.co.nz
www.mastertrade.co.nz
www.micobathrooms.co.nz
www.plumbingplus.co.nz
www.robertson.co.nz
www.sopers.co.nz

For advice about useful bathroom aids and wet area bathroom options talk to your local Disability Information Centre. Find your nearest Centre by visiting www.nzfdc.org.nz or ask us for a referral, 0800 777 797.

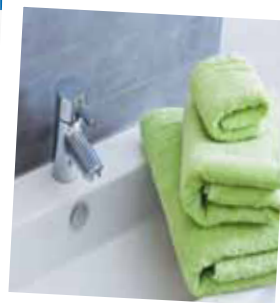


PHOTO: DOMIN. DOWN. STOCKPHOTO

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