

Stair Lifts

14 Things You Must Know **BEFORE** You Buy



Stay Safe
On and Off the Stairs

Trip hazards: how to
anticipate and avoid them



An Important Message from Paul Harlin

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I wrote this special report because it is my mission to ensure that our seniors receive the very best care available. Unfortunately, some stair lift vendors take advantage of the elderly and those who are injured or otherwise impaired — simply because they do not have the information they need to make an informed decision. I have been installing elevators, ramps and stair lifts for over a decade. This e-book provides answers to the most common questions about installing and using stair lifts. I hope this information enables you to make a better decision for yourself or a loved one.

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1 Stair Lifts Attach to Your Steps — Not the Wall

If the steps are strong enough for you to walk on them, they are strong enough to support a stair lift.

● Notice the foot plates that attach to the stairs.



2

Stair Width is Critical

Stair lifts position you sideways on the stairs. This makes the width of the stairs important. If your stairs are at least 36" wide, most brands of stair lifts will fit well. If you have long bones from your hip to your knee (i.e., you are tall), or you have trouble flexing your knee(s), the width can become an issue. There are some more expensive models that turn you in line with the

stairs and work on stairs as narrow as 29". You might also consider a narrower "Perch" model that allows you to stand as you move up and down the stairs. If you are unsure about width or design, have a professional installer come to your home BEFORE you buy to ensure that the unit will work for you in your home.

Most lifts will fit well on stairs that are 36" wide.



3

Your Choice: Left or Right Hand Controls



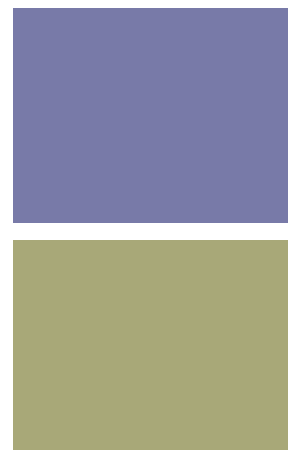
Stair lifts require you to maintain pressure on the controls all the way up and down the stairs. This is most often a lever of some kind at the end of the right arm rest for most models. Most manufacturers allow the installer to move this control to the left arm rest if need be. Be sure to check with your installer to see if moving this control is possible.

4

Top and Bottom Controls.

Most stair lifts also come with two controllers, one each for the top and bottom of the staircase, that move the chair between floors when you are not in it. Like the arm controller, you have to maintain pressure on a button to call or send the chair between floors. This allows two or more users to always have access to the chair no matter what level they are on. It can also be

useful when sending groceries or laundry between floors with the chairlift.



5

Straight Stair Lifts

Straight units are the most economical choice (\$3000 to \$6000 including installation for most brands). Most dealers stock straight stair lifts, or they can order one with the specific features you would like within 7-10 days. Installations can be completed in only one day, making this also the fastest solution to your stair lift needs. However, custom stair lifts are required for any stairs with turns, curves or inconsistent step size. See number 11 for more details.



6 Measuring Length for Straight Stair Lifts

Your stair length is measured from the bottom landing to the nose of the top step. If that measurement is 15 feet or less, the standard package will work for you. The standard package

comes with 16 feet of rail because you need 10” to 12” of rail above the top step. Extension kits up to 23-24 feet in length are available for most brands.



You need 10” to 12” of rail above the top step.



7

Seat positions for a Straight Stair Lift

To see what your stair lift will look like, take a dining room chair and place it at the bottom of your stairs as close to the bottom nose as possible. This is where you will sit down on your stair lift chair. You will then ride up the stairs (with your back to the wall in most cases) until the chair comes to a stop over the top step (see first photo). You'll then press a lever to allow the chair to swivel (see second photo), moving your feet over the

top landing (see third photo). Then you'll simply stand up to move about on the upper level of your home. Some models of stair lifts offer a power swivel option. That means that the chair will automatically swivel when you reach the top of the stairs. This is an important feature for those who are experiencing limited movement with their arms and hands or having memory issues. ([Click here to see video.](#))



8

Trip Hazards

Straight stair lift tracks extend beyond both the bottom step (12-16") and the top nose (10-12"). If the wall beside your staircase extends beyond the top and bottom steps, this track will not be a trip hazard and a standard unit will meet your needs. However, if the top or

bottom of the rail (or both) sticks out into hallways or normal walking spaces, you should consider additional safety features for your stair lift. See the next two sections for options, and be sure to consult a professional to help you determine which features are right for you.



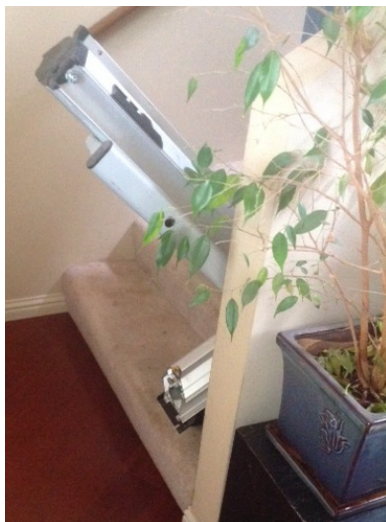
Why is the stair lift in this picture not up against the wall? In this case, the unit would have caused a trip hazard at the top of the stairs, so it needed to be installed on the right side

9

Auto-Folding Rail Option

When the bottom of the rail sticks out into a normal walking space, you should consider a folding rail option. It works like a railroad crossing arm. When the chair is at the bottom of the stairs, the rail is folded down and sticks out past the bottom stair nose. This is not a trip hazard

because the chair is a visible reminder to walk around it. When you ride up the stairs, the bottom portion of the rail folds up (like the crossing guard arm), so that it no longer sticks out past the bottom nose. It will remain in the up position until the chair travels back down the stairs.



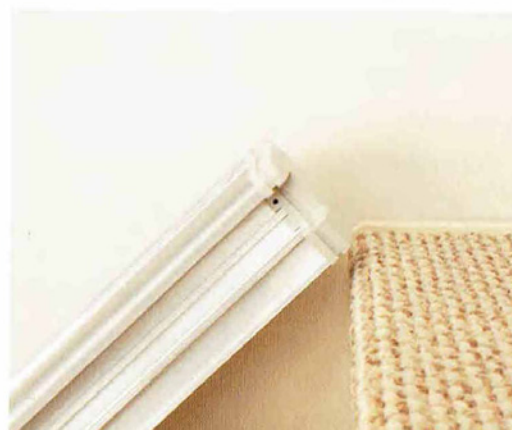
When you ride up the stairs, the bottom of the rail folds up.

10 Sliding Rail Option

In situations where the rail at the top of the stairs sticks out into your normal walking space, your options are fewer but VERY important to address. (This trip hazard could cause you or a loved one to fall all the way down the stairs.) One manufacturer makes a sliding rail. It provides a solution for trip

hazards at both the top and bottom by sliding the rail in the same direction as the chair is traveling. It automatically moves the rail into a safe position. If this option is not available for the brand you have chosen, be sure to place a vase, plant or any tall object behind the rail to prevent tripping.

The slide track moves toward or away from **the hall floor** as you travel up or down.



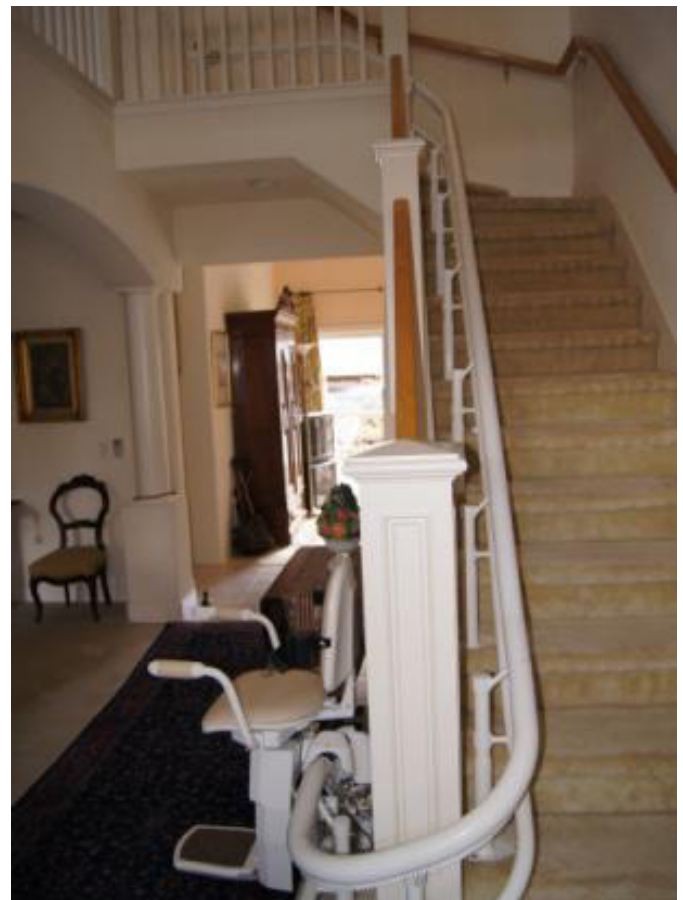
The slide track moves toward or away from **the landing** as you travel up or down.

11 Custom Stair Lifts

For stairs with varying shapes, a landing in the middle, multiple strings of steps, curved or irregularly shaped steps, a custom stair lift will be required. This means that the rail that the chair runs on will be made specifically for your stairs. This gives you much more flexibility in your configuration and, as you would expect, comes with a larger price tag (commonly \$9,000 to \$18,000). Manufacture of a custom stair lift typically takes 4 to 8 weeks.

My favorite option to include when laying out a custom stair lift is to move the chair completely out of the stairwell itself, with

straight overruns and 90 or 180 degree swings at the top and bottom of the run. (See photos) This clears your staircase, so there is no chair blocking the path when large items (like furniture) need to be moved up and down the stairs. It can also make the chair simpler to use by eliminating the need for the seat swivel. You simply sit down, press and hold a lever in the direction you want to travel until the chair stops, and then stand up.



12

Manufacturers Matter

No matter what make or model stair lift you buy, you will need parts and service. That's why choosing the right manufacturer really matters. Some offer great service and have parts readily available; others don't. Sadly, some manufacturers choose to spend their money on Internet

marketing and selling over the phone, rather than taking care of their customers. Ask your local dealer which manufacturers will stand behind their products. If you can't get parts when you need them, your stair lift will be useless.

These manufacturers are reliable and stand behind their product.



handicare

13

Quality Installation and Support Matter

This is not a job for a handyman. There are many unique considerations in every installation that impact ease of use, safety and aesthetics. Electrical access, appropriate wiring and serviceability must also be taken into account. Batteries need to be maintained and replaced periodically. You'll want someone

there when you have a problem. You may also need them to remove it when it is no longer needed. Check the credentials of whomever is installing your lift. At a minimum, the installer should be a licensed contractor with stair lift experience. A certified stair lift specialist is always preferable.

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Is a Stair Lift the Best Choice for You?

Now that you understand all of the options, features and costs involved in choosing a stair lift for your home, you should ask your contractor one more question: Is a stair lift the best product to meet my needs? While a stair lift is great for getting a loved one up and down the stairs—and the seat will carry a loaded laundry basket—it will not move walkers, scooters or wheelchairs between floors.

If you have a suitable location, a platform lift or small personal elevator (Stiltz—see photo) should also be considered. Although they cost a little more than the custom stair lift (in the \$20,000 range), the ease with which you can move yourself,

a loved one and other rolling items between levels is worth consideration. Be sure to talk with your sales representative about these options when he/she visits your home.



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