

The FindATub Walk-In Tub Buyer's Guide

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Whether as a luxury, a convenience, or a safety-driven necessity, installing a walk-in tub in your home delivers a wealth of benefits. Walk-in tubs help users relax, give them the confidence they need to maintain their independence, and provides family members the peace mind that comes with knowing older or mobility-challenged loved ones will be safe when performing their daily bathroom routines.



Why You Should Consider a Walk-in Tub

The most obvious distinction between a walk-in tub and a conventional bathtub is an access door built into the tub's sidewall. This eliminates the burden of climbing over the wall or sitting on it and swinging your legs over the side to enter the tub. These methods can be challenging and dangerous for anyone experiencing weakness, joint pain, or poor equilibrium. Add wet surfaces, slippery soap residues, and slick, non-porous tub material, and it's no wonder that 80 percent of falls in the home happen in the bathroom. Ease of entry and exit from is the walk-in tub's greatest benefit. But there are many others available, depending on the style of tub you choose:

1.

Built-in seats enable you to elevate yourself while bathing. This alleviates the stress your knees and hips would otherwise bear in lowering your body to the tub's floor.

2.

Higher water capacity creates a more immersive experience. Deeper water allows more of your body to remain submerged, increasing your buoyancy and facilitating washing.

3.

Safety features such as grab bars and slip-resistant floor textures reduce the chances of falling while getting into, out of, and using walk-in tubs.

4.

Therapeutic options often are included in walk-in tubs used by people who need to rehabilitate from injuries or treat chronic conditions. Massaging jets to relieve muscle aches and chroma- and aromatherapies to elevate mood are common add-ons.

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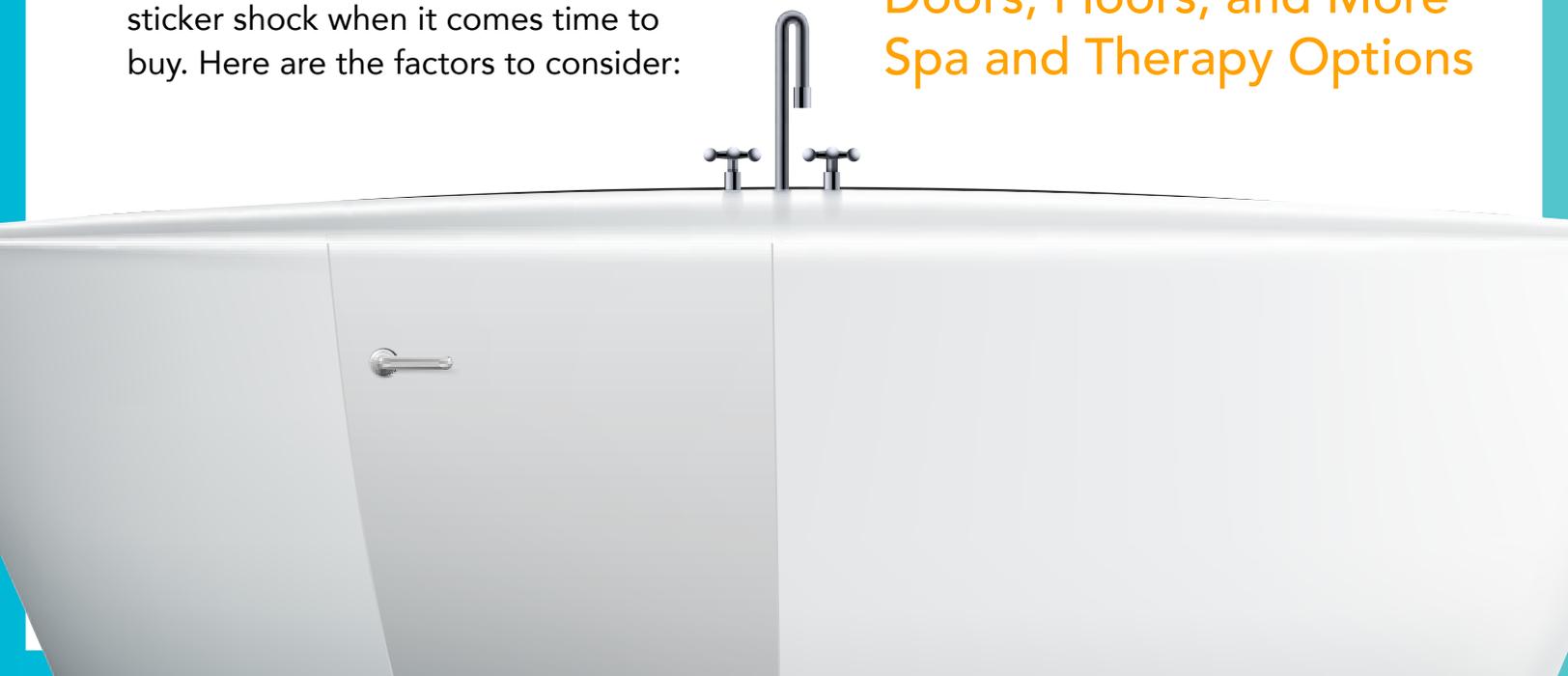
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Still, a walk-in tub represents a major household enhancement and a significant monetary investment. While these tubs all come with doors that allow bathers to step into them, there are a number of design, safety, and optional features that vary by tub type. The good news is these variables ensure you can customize your new walk-in tub to suit your preferences and lifestyle. The not-so-good news is that so many options can make selecting the right tub for you more difficult and complicated.

That's why FindATub has created this handy buyer's guide to help you assess your needs and find the perfect walk-in tub for your circumstances. When you know what is available, how much each desirable feature and upgrade can cost, you will gain a better understanding of what you must have, what would be nice to include, and what you can easily do without. This will make budgeting your new walk-in tub more focused and eliminate any sticker shock when it comes time to buy. Here are the factors to consider:

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Size and Design
Materials and Hardware
Filling and Draining
Doors, Floors, and More
Spa and Therapy Options



Size and Design

Walk-in tubs are designed to match several primary functions. Some are built primarily for practicality while others emphasize comfort. Many take the user's physical limitations. The following chart lists the common varieties of walk-in tubs, along with their distinguishing features and they type of users who should consider getting them. Note that tub configurations and geometries may make some unsuitable for compact bathrooms.

Tub Type	Features	Consider if...
Tub Type	Sometimes called a "sitting bath," a soaker submerses the user from the neck-down while they are sitting in a fixed seat built into the tub at a normal sitting height (around 17 inches from the floor). The seat allows bathers to easily reach and wash their feet, legs, and lower backs without overexertion. These tubs' cube shape makes them more compact than other designs, providing ample access space and usability in smaller bathrooms.	You seek a small, budget-friendly walk-in tub and do not need the "frills" or advanced health and safety features other models offer.
Lay Down	Longer and usually not as deep as soaker tubs, lay down walk-in tubs allow users to stretch their legs along their standard 50- to 60-inch sitting area lengths. Wall heights of 36 to 40 inches allow most bathers to submerge themselves up to about chest level without "scrunching down" or bending their knees.	You have enough room to accommodate a longer tub and do not worry that you will be able to hoist yourself from a sitting position on the tub's floor.

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Tub Type	Features	Consider if...
Bariatric	Reinforced to accommodate heavier users, bariatric walk-in tubs usually are 32 inches wide (compared to 30 inches for standard models) and 55 to 60 inches deep. They have capacities up to 50 percent larger than regular soaker walk-ins.	You weigh more than 300 pounds or have a body type that requires a wider door or seat.
Two-seater	With elevated seats at each end or side-by-side and a communal leg well, two-seater walk-in tubs are made so couples can share the bathing experience, or a caregiver/therapist can enter the tub along with a patient to administer treatments or oversee physical activities.	You want to share a bath with a loved one or will use your walk-in tub for rehab or other activities that require a caregiver to be in the tub with you.
Bath/ shower combo	Many walk-in tubs include handheld shower attachments which can be replaced with a riser column and attached overhead rain shower head and adjustable wand so you can shower while seated or standing. Tub wall attachments prevent oversplash.	You want the speed and convenience of showering or don't always want to wait for your walk-in tub to fill and drain.
Wheelchair accessible	With extra-wide doors that swing outward to provide unhampered access, these tubs allow you to maneuver a wheelchair next to the built-in seat, so you can easily slide into the tub. The door closes easily with minimal force, so you don't have to contort your body to gain leverage. Strategically placed handles and ergonomic storage areas help mobility-challenged bathers maintain their privacy and independence.	You have a medical condition, physical limitation or special needs that make accessing the bathtub difficult.

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Materials and Hardware

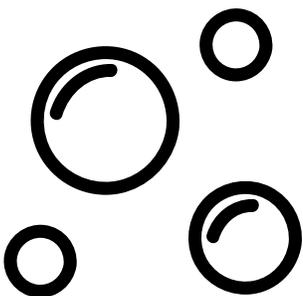
The material manufacturers choose to form the basin, walls, fixtures, tubing, and other components will go a long way toward determining a walk-in tub's durability, lifespan, and cost.

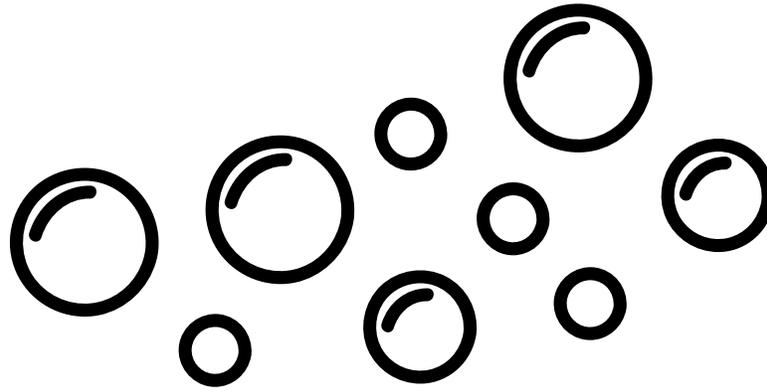
Fiberglass

The most affordable tub material, fiberglass is a matrix of glass strands that are woven tightly together to form panels that are then heated and molded into the tub shape. The base material is coated with a hardening gel glaze. The trade-off for the lower initial price is more intensive maintenance. The topcoat is more porous than other walk-in tub materials, which allows tiny pockets of water to collect. These tiny tidepools attract dirt, mold and mildew and must be scrubbed frequently. The glaze veneer may also be susceptible to damage from impact and incision, which can allow water to penetrate into the fiberglass itself, requiring reglazing or replacing the tub.

Acrylic

Usually longer-lasting and more durable than fiberglass, walk-in tubs built from molded acrylic sheets are nonporous, so they dirt and water cannot penetrate to make the surface dingy. Acrylic also is more malleable than fiberglass, so tub seats, shelves, headrests, and small details are almost always made of the material. Acrylic is stronger than the gelcoat that covers fiberglass tubs, so it resists cracking and chipping. Acrylic also has insulative qualities, so tubs made of the material keeps bathwater hot for longer periods. Unlike porcelain and other common bathroom materials, it even feels warmer than room temperature.



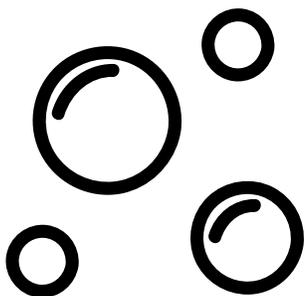


Enameled Steel

Though it is often still used in traditional bathtubs, enameled steel (or porcelain steel) is being phased out in the walk-in tub industry. Several manufacturers still make enameled steel walk-in tubs because they are easy to clean, with proper care, retain their shiny surface for decades. Without proper care, however, they are susceptible to damage that can allow water to penetrate to the steel frame, causing rust stains on the enamel. In contrast with acrylic, the steel undergirding is cold to the touch. This can be an issue because bathers must sit or stand inside the tub before it begins to fill. Bare skin on cold, hard steel can create an unpleasant wake-up call. On the other hand, these tubs conduct heat well, so once they are filled, they keep the water warm for a long time.

Fixtures

The handles, tubing, valves, and other components that deliver water to your walk-in tub also contribute to its cost and maintenance. Plastic is the budget option and works fine for a while. Just understand that this material wears faster than any metal, so you will need to replace various components as they break. Zinc is a common choice for tub fixtures. It provides more durability than plastic and costs less than stainless steel and brass. The patina that zinc forms, however, is not fully waterproof. Zinc and zinc alloy fixtures corrode faster than those made from other metals, so they have to be replaced more often. Stainless steel is often seen as a good compromise among appearance, durability, and cost. Brass is the gold standard because it is water resistant and does not scratch easily. As the top-of-the-line material, brass will add to the cost of your walk-in tub.



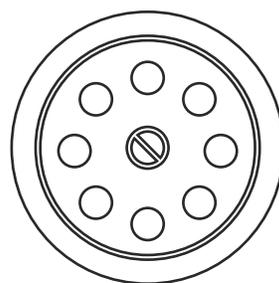
Filling and Draining

Because their capacity is so much higher than traditional bathtubs, walk-in tubs vary greatly in the time required to fill and drain them. This is a bigger concern than with traditional tubs because they require the door to be closed during the process. That means you must be inside the tub while it fills and drains. You can't simply turn on the water as hot as it can go, then wait to get in until it cools to a comfortable temperature. Similarly, you can't just get out when the water starts to get cool. You have to sit in it until it drains. While your plumbing system will contribute to how quickly your walk-in tub will fill and drain, the features that come with the tub you choose also will affect these attributes. Again, the more bells and whistles you include to make your bathing experience enjoyable, the more you can expect to pay.

If waiting eight minutes or so for your tub to fill completely is unacceptable, you can choose a tub equipped with fast-filling taps. These fixtures use pressurized pumps to push more water through the pipes, often filling the tub twice as fast as standard taps can finish the job. Being able to control the temperature of the water that enters the bath is an important safety consideration. Prevent scalding or the shock of freezing water by purchasing

a walk-in tub equipped with thermostatic controls that allow hot and cold water to mix before it enters the basin.

Fast draining can be accomplished via several mechanisms, so you don't have to sit in tepid water for long at the end of your bathing session. You can get out and get warm and dry two to three times faster using one of these options to drain your tub in two minutes or less. Walk-in tubs with dual drains double the speed at which water exits the basin. Others mount a pump to their drains to assist gravity in evacuating the water. Pumps suck the wet stuff through the drain, increasing its capacity.



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Doors, Floors, and More

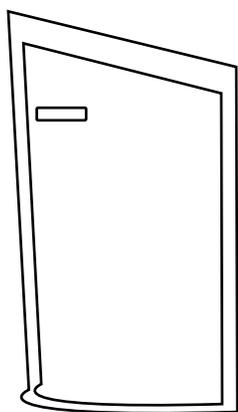
The shape, location, and orientation of your walk-in tub's door and seat may not affect its cost, but the surely will affect your comfort and may even rule out some designs for your bathroom. Pay attention to these details so you can gain the maximum benefit from your walk-in tub:

Door Shape

Some door designs may accommodate your physical condition and state of health more than others. The U-shaped doors used for most standard walk-in tubs create a sleeker design, are easier to manipulate, and allow the tub to fit into tighter spaces without letting the door bang against walls, vanities, or commodes. Larger people, those with limited mobility, and wheelchair users may prefer an inverted-L-shaped door. The larger space at the top allows more room to get situated on the tub's seat.

Door Orientation

The first walk-in tub doors swung inward so the water pressure pushing against them would push them tighter against the frame. This design is still common, but there are reasons to select an outward-swinging door. These doors leave the tub basin clear, ensuring you won't trip over them as you enter and take your seat. They do require more room, however, as they must be able to swing fully open without hitting objects in your bathroom. You should also know whether you need the door to open from the left or right to fit in your home's space.



Floor Design

Slips and falls are common bathroom hazards, so walk-in tub manufacturers have innovated ways to help you maintain your balance when using their products. Choose the slip-prevention method that works best for you. Possibilities include treads molded into the tub surface to channel water away from your feet and adding textures to the tub floor to give your feet something to grip.

Seat Height

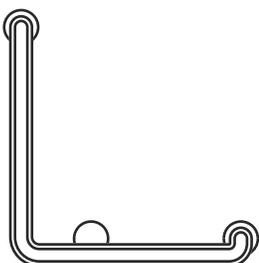
The Americans with Disabilities Act recommends 17-inch walk-in tub seat, and most brands adhere to that guideline or manufacture their tubs with slightly higher (up to 20 inches) heights. Elevated seats do not require bathers to lower themselves as far as they must when using lay-down tubs, reducing the chance for slipping. Seats minimize the pressure on bathers' knee when settling into and getting up from their soaks. Combined with out-swinging L-shaped doors, the higher seat facilitates transfers to and from wheelchairs.

Threshold

The bottom of your walk-in tub's door cannot be flush with the bathroom floor, so the height of the threshold can be a problem if you have trouble lifting your foot as you walk. Most manufacturers have reduced the threshold to four inches or so, but some can be as high as seven inches or as low as 2½ inches.

Grab Bars

With safety the primary reason many people choose walk-in tubs, it makes sense to install handrails to assist in entering, exiting, and moving around. Grab bars provide leverage, balance, and confidence. Larger bathers should check the weight rating to see how much each bar can hold. Handrails come in a variety of finishes and shapes, so you can choose the ones that fit your style and needs.



Spa and Therapy Options

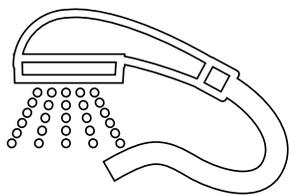
Many walk-in tubs seek to replicate the hot tub experience and even offer options often associated with luxurious day spas. These add-ons may be desirable if you want to pamper yourself during bath time, but they also have proven effective in relieving pain, encouraging relaxations, and alleviating anxiety, making them more of a necessity than a luxury.

Air Jets

Valves propel warm air through the water, creating small bubbles that surround the bather and stimulate nerve endings. The gentle sensation helps muscles relax.

Chromatherapy

Some walk-in tubs include colored lights under the water surface to help invigorate or calm bathers as they soak. Science has shown that some colors have a relaxing effect while others make us more creative and energetic.



Water Jets

Similarly, water jets shoot streams directly at specific areas of the body. More targeted and forceful than air jets, water jets impact tight muscles with massage-like regularity to relieve aches and improve circulation.

Aromatherapy

Scents can have similar affects. That's why bathers often burn incense, light candles, and infuse the water with rose petals. Aromatherapy-equipped walk-in tubs save you the trouble by atomizing essential oils directly through the bathwater. Advocates suggest lavender for relaxation, peppermint for digestion, lemon for digestion, eucalyptus for congestion relief, and more.

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With even a basic soaker walk-in tub costing \$2,500 or more and two-seater., fully therapeutic models topping five figures, you should take the time to compare prices and features. Start by assessing your needs and budget. Decide what attributes your tub should have to give you the peace of mind you need to use it to its full benefit. Your autonomy or your loved ones' freedom are priceless, but there is no reason to spend money on bells and whistles that will not be used.

That said, a walk-in tub's value can far exceed its cost. Not only do these bathroom upgrades make life easier and more enjoyable while assuring your independence and self-reliance, but they also add to your home's resale value – recouping up to two-thirds of the purchase price. Homebuyers, especially those nearing retirement age or dealing with mobility limitations, appreciate the convenience of moving into a home already equipped with a walk-in tub.



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