

Creating a Safe Home

Many seniors choose to live at home because of its convenience and emotional associations and because it is, after all, their home. It takes work, planning and preparation, however, to make a home safe for the elderly—particularly those who are suffering from some degree of physical and/or mental impairment.

Up to 50 percent of all home

accidents can be prevented through modification or repair. The best way to avoid accidents is to conduct a thorough room-by-room inspection, identifying and making a list of problem areas. An exterior inspection is important as well. The time spent in repairing and modifying the home can be invaluable for preventing future accidents for your loved one.

Kitchen

- Use a nonskid rug or runner in front of the kitchen sink
- Keep the floor clean of grease and other materials
- Install a fire extinguisher (rated for kitchen use) and smoke alarm

Access to the Home

- Install ramps to doors where there are stairs.
- Make sure there is salt or sand by the front door in winter, and keep snow shoveled.
- Repair sidewalks and walkways.
- Make sure the yard and walkways are free of debris.

Stairs

- Install sturdy handrails on both sides of stairs.
- Build ramps to be used instead of steps or stairs.
- Install a stair lift.
- Mark the edges of stairs with bright or reflective tape.
- Put anti-slip treads on steps and stairs.

Bathroom

- Install grab bars by tubs and toilets.
- Use a raised toilet seat.
- Install a liquid soap dispenser in shower.
- Use nonskid strips, decals, or a rubber mat in the tub or shower.
- Provide a transfer bench if needed by the bath for a person in a wheelchair.
- Be careful of bath oils and lotions on the feet.
- Use a screw-in shower rod.
- Clean up all water on the floor promptly.

Miscellaneous

- Use night lights throughout the home.
- Ensure that there is adequate, strong lighting.
- Use low-glare bulbs, and aim lights at a wall or the ceiling.
- Make a flashlight and other light easily accessible to the bed.
- Install grab bars in closets
- Use portable phones.
- Organize paperwork, closets, medicine cabinets, and shelves so items are easily accessed.
- Keep the house warm enough for comfort and safety during winter.
- Provide air conditioning or fans in the summer.
- Check and repair insulation and storm windows.
- Install lever handles on faucets and doors.

Floors

- Replace worn carpet with low-pile, wall-to-wall carpeting.
- Nail or tack down loose carpet edges.
- Avoid throw rugs.
- Repair loose floorboards.
- Remove thresholds at doorways and between rooms.
- Keep floors clear of clutter, wires, stools, or other items that can cause tripping.
- Use only nonskid wax.