

Fall Prevention Starts at Home

50+ fall prevention tips, for every area in your home

General Tips

- 1.** Plan as early as possible for modifications, interventions, and renovations...**before** changes are needed! Discuss your plans with family members; they may be able to help you with modifications and light renovation work or refer you to reputable contractors.
- 2.** Rearrange furniture, if necessary, to improve traffic flow in every room and hallway. Paths should be clear, wide, and straight...to be able to move straight through the space and get from room to room. This may result in having less furniture, but the room will look bigger, and be safer.
- 3.** Cords are a trip hazard. Reroute cords (including charging cables) so they don't cross where you walk or get caught up in your feet when you're sitting. That might mean getting a longer extension cord so it can travel along a wall instead of across the room. Or consider getting an electrician to install additional outlets. Don't fasten cords to the walls or furniture with staples or nails; instead, use tape, clips, or wire management tools designed for this purpose.
- 4.** Review all floor coverings in your home:
 - Carpet should be tight against the floor, and in good shape. Remove fraying/damaged carpet, or secure well with double-sided tape or nails. If carpet needs to be stretched back into place, a local flooring installer can do this or refer you to someone locally.
 - Consider throwing away, selling, or donating all throw rugs or area rugs. If you decide to keep them, use special double-sided carpet tape to secure, and check regularly to make sure it is holding all edges of the rug(s) tightly.
 - If you have carpeted stairs, make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step (with no tears or holes), or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads on the steps.

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- If stairs are a hard surface material (such as wood, tile, or vinyl), consider applying non-skid “grit” tape (available at local hardware stores) along the front edges of each step.
- 5.** If you have ceiling fans or lights that require pull cords, consider hiring an electrician to link ceiling lights/fans to a wall switches (some can even be programmed to handheld remote controls), to eliminate the need to look and reach up.

Lighting

- 1.** Ensure that lighting is bright enough to see as you walk from the sidewalk or your car to the door you use most frequently. Repeat this process with all other “secondary” entrances to your home, and any paths along those walkways. Consider adding additional light fixtures, replacing existing bulbs with brighter ones (see fixture for maximum wattage allowed), and/or installing landscape lighting to light your path.
- 2.** Some may find it helpful to replace light switch plates with ones that glow in the dark, and to replace toggle switches with more user-friendly pressure plate controls. Light switches should be located immediately inside and outside of doorways, and directly at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- 3.** If glare is a problem at windows, consider hanging lightweight curtains that will still allow filtered light.
- 4.** For hall fixtures, use the maximum wattage bulb allowed (there should be a sticker on the fixture indicating this information). If you do not know the correct wattage, use a 60-watt bulb. Consider adding more lamps or light fixtures in dark hallways. You don’t want lighting to produce glare or shadows. If this is a problem, try frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, or lampshades. Also, for long hallways, have switches at each end of the hallway for light fixtures.
- 5.** Stairway light bulbs can be hard to reach. Use bulbs with a long lifespan. Lighting in the stairwell should be homogeneous and bright, not casting any shadow or creating any glare. If you don’t already have light fixtures at both the top and bottom of the stairs, have a handyman or an electrician put in an overhead light at each of these locations.
- 6.** In your bedroom, install light switches within arms’ reach of the bed or have lamps with switches within easy reach of where you sleep. You can also attach a small lamp to the headboard.
- 7.** If you travel down a hallway to get to the bathroom at night, consider plugging in nightlights in all outlets down the hallway, to light your path.

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- 8.** Sometimes switches need to be rewired or relocated for practicality. If you only have one light switch for your stairs (such as only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs), or if the switches at the top AND the bottom of the stairs both have to be on for the light to work...have a handyman or an electrician put in an independent light switch(es) at the top and bottom of the stairs.

Entrance

- 1.** Small landings (less than 5' square) at front/back door entrances can cause awkward turns to make room for an outward swinging door. This is a fall risk. There should be enough room to the side of your door to avoid the door swing. If there isn't enough space, add to your landing or remount the door to minimize this kind of clumsy entrance.
- 2.** When you move from one type of floor surface to another, the change in surface textures can put you at risk for falls (especially if it's raining or snowing outside and your shoes track moisture inside to a slick surface). Make sure that transition strips at doorways (usually metal) are tight and seamlessly wedged in between outer and inner floor surfaces. Also, flooring inside the doorways should be level, sturdy and non-slip, to ensure a more secure footing.
- 3.** Exterior wooden porch or deck steps can rot or weaken over time and may need to be replaced. Stair treads should be deep enough for your whole foot—at least 8 inches, but 10 to 11 is better. A stair rise should be no higher than 7 inches from one step to the next; a smaller rise is even better. Don't forget to have sturdy handrails installed (see Stairs Tips for more information, along with additional recommendations).
- 4.** If outdoor steps get slippery dependant on the weather and time of year, you can paint them with a paint that has a rough texture. If painting isn't an option, outdoor abrasive tape can also be applied to the stair treads for better traction.

Stairs

- 1.** Evaluate your handrails, with the following recommendations in mind:
 - Handrails should be round or oval-shaped, for easier grip, and a contrasting color from the walls.
 - Handrails should be installed on both sides of stairs, extending beyond the top and bottom steps, to your "landing areas." If space doesn't allow for handrails to extend beyond the steps, then handrails should be at least as long as the stairs.

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- Fix loose handrails or install new ones. Make sure that the handrail is secured into the studs in the wall—you may need to hire a handyman to help.
- 2.** If you have impaired vision or are concerned about missing that first or last step, place colored tape or paint a line at the edge of the step(s) so you can see the edge when walking.
- 3.** Don't place any items on the steps. If you need a place to stage items that are going up/downstairs, consider mounting a small wall shelf or hanging a tote bag for these items on a hook nearby. You can also place an extra chair near a stairway to collect things that are heading to another floor—just make sure the chair is not blocking a walkway.

Living Areas

- 1.** If you have impaired vision or simply want to eliminate obstacles, consider removing your low-height coffee table. See General Tip #2 about having clear, wide, straight paths through rooms.
- 2.** To help with both mobility and stability as you get in/out of them, chairs and sofas that you use the most often should have sturdy, supportive armrests.
- 3.** If the seat height of your chairs or upholstered furniture is low (less than 19" from the floor to the top of the seat), consider enlisting the help of an upholsterer to modify the cushions to be thicker and more firm. You can also buy a chair pad, or have a thicker seat cushion made, to place on top of existing cushions and give you an extra boost in height as you sit.

Bathroom

- 1.** If floor space is tight inside the bathroom, make sure the door to the room swings outward. If there is a fall or an accident, it could be difficult to access the injured person if they are blocking the door. A handyman can help with this modification, if needed.
- 2.** Consider installing a raised toilet seat with arms on either side. Or, install grab bars next to the toilet (see note below about grab bars).
- 3.** Along the top and uppermost inside edges of the sink(s), clear, non-slip tape may be applied, to reduce hands slipping if these surfaces are grabbed in the instance of a fall.

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- **4.** Consider these strategies for your bathtub or shower:
 - If you use a shower curtain with a rod, make sure the shower rod is securely screwed into the wall (not the kind that turn to adjust to the width of the opening, and fasten to the wall with rubber feet). Closet bars with mounting brackets also make good shower rods.
 - On the bathtub or shower floor, apply non-slip floor decals or non-skid strips to prevent slips and falls.
 - A bath bench or shower seat allows you to shower without getting tired or risk falling because of dizziness (which can also be a symptom when you're sick). Shower benches or seats are also helpful when washing feet or shaving legs.
 - An adjustable hand shower can be useful and handy. Some find that the vertical, wall-mounted bar gives an additional surface to grab.
 - In the bath or shower, the key is to have everything within reach (reducing the need to turn around). A wall-mounted dispenser (for shampoo, conditioner, and liquid soap) mounted to the side of the shower or tub wall is an easy fix. Also, fishing for that slippery bar of soap that fell in the tub can be dangerous; you may find that liquid soap in a dispenser is more convenient. Another modification, that has been found to be useful, is a shelf situated right next to where you'll be sitting or standing in the shower.
 - If you're planning a bathroom renovation, the convenience of a curbless, zero-entry walk-in shower is a worthwhile investment. Check references, and make sure the contractor you hire to do this work knows how to install the shower pan properly; otherwise, you could end up with standing water outside the shower.
 - Install grab bars next to and inside the tub or shower (see note below about grab bars). Towel bars cannot support a person's weight and cannot safely be used to lift yourself or hold onto for balance when moving or getting into or out of the tub or shower.

**A note about grab bars: The importance of installing grab bars as a tool for safety and fall prevention cannot be understated. Grab bars not only make bathing and toilet use more autonomous and safer experiences but can greatly reduce seniors' fear of falling. Studies have shown that when available, seniors will use grab bars more often than not. As with any tool or modification, it is important to tailor grab bars to the individual's physical needs (such as different heights, angles, colors, space from the wall, etc). Oftentimes a bathroom wall needs to be reinforced to make sure the grab rails can support a person's weight. A licensed contractor can help with this need.*

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Kitchen

- 1.** Rearrange your cupboards, so that you keep things you use most often on the lower shelves (about waist high) and within easy reach. Your most convenient cupboard should store items you use every day. Do not put heavy items on shelves where you have to reach up; these items should be about waist high, if possible. Install sliding shelves or lazy susans in corner cupboards, to give easier access and be able to see contents better. If you are remodeling, you may want to consider having no upper cabinets and instead mount artwork or display shelves along those walls.
- 2.** If you're comfortable having a mat on the floor, place a water-absorbent, non-skid mat in front of the sink to catch spills. Use special double-sided carpet tape to secure it to the floor; check regularly to make sure the tape is holding all edges of the mat tightly.
- 3.** Use stable chairs with arms at your kitchen table or breakfast area, to help with both mobility and stability as you get in/out of them.
- 4.** Invest in a new, steady step stool (with a bracing bar to hold onto), for reaching items on higher shelves or in cabinets. Most of these stools fold up for easy storage, and have sturdy, non-skid steps and legs that grip the floor to help keep you steady.

Bedroom

- 1.** Use a wide mattress, at the proper height. Your mattress should not be too high or too low...legs should be at a 90-degree angle when sitting on the mattress, with feet flat on the floor.
- 2.** Have a phone (and charger /charging cord with outlet, if cordless or cellular) within arms' reach of where you sleep, with emergency phone numbers written down and easily accessible.
- 3.** In closets, position closet shelves between waist and shoulder high, to avoid excessive bending/reaching.
- 4.** Provide stable chairs with arms, to help with both mobility and stability as you get in/out of them.

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