



How to Make Your Home Safer for Seniors

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More seniors than ever are choosing to age in place, which means they're staying in their own homes instead of making other living arrangements. Aging in place has many benefits, including increased community engagement, the ability to remain in a familiar environment, [improved self-esteem](#) and a renewed sense of independence. If you paid off your home, aging in place can also help you save a substantial amount of money, as you won't have to worry about making a monthly rent or mortgage payment.

Despite the benefits of aging in place, many seniors struggle to remain in their homes due to unsafe living conditions. The National Safety Council notes that [more than 25% of older adults](#) report at least one fall each year. Seniors are also vulnerable to injuries caused by fires and environmental hazards, making safety an important consideration for older adults and their loved ones.

You can quickly address some safety issues, such as poor bedroom lighting, without spending much money. Other hazards are more extensive and require major repairs or renovations. If you want to age in place, it's important to ensure you have a safe living environment. You can do this by completing a home inspection designed to identify general hazards as well as safety issues specific to older adults.

This guide includes valuable tips for improving home safety and introduces some tools you can use to make your living environment safe enough for aging in place. You'll also find a home safety inspection checklist to help you identify and eliminate indoor and outdoor safety hazards.

Tips for Improving Safety in the Home

When you think of home safety, you may think of installing smoke alarms or testing your home for radon. These are important steps, but many seniors don't realize that the risk of falls is one of the most serious hazards in a home. According to the CDC, an older adult [falls once every second](#), leading to about 3 million emergency room visits each year. Around 20% of falls result in some type of injury, making it essential that you understand how to reduce your risk of falls at home. Here are some tips to help you get started.



CHANGE

CHANGE?

Upgrade your lighting

If your home lacks adequate lighting, you may not be able to see well enough to notice tripping hazards or know when to adjust your gait to account for transitions from one type of surface to another.

- Ensure every room has adequate light

- Consider adding floor lamps, LED light strips, or table lamps for extra brightness

Use mobility aids

Seniors with poor balance have an increased risk of falls, especially in homes with uneven flooring and other hazards.

- Use a cane, walker or other mobility aid to get around your home.

- Ensure the aid is the right size for your body. Make sure devices with wheels roll smoothly over each surface.

- If needed, request a physical or occupational therapy evaluation from your physician.

Wear appropriate footwear

Flip-flops and sandals may be comfortable, but they're not ideal for navigating your home as they can slip off your feet or get stuck under furniture and other objects

- Wear supportive footwear with nonskid soles.

Eliminate clutter

The more furniture and other items you have in your home, the more objects you have to navigate around when you're walking, increasing the risk of falls and bruises.

- Pare down your furniture collection to only the most essential items.

- Reduce the number of decorative items in your home to open up more floor space.

Repair or replace damaged flooring

Loose, cracked or otherwise damaged flooring creates a tripping hazard, increasing the risk of falls in the home.

- Repair or replace damaged flooring.

- Move throw rugs that can either slide or be a tripping hazard.



Get regular vision care

In some cases, falls occur due to visual impairments that make it difficult to see potential hazards.

have cataracts, glaucoma or another eye condition, your doctor may recommend surgery to improve your vision.

- Get a stronger lens prescription for your glasses, if needed.

Install grab bars

Getting in and out of the shower can be difficult, especially if you have poor balance. Protect yourself from shower-related injuries by installing grab bars in your bathroom. If you lose your balance while using the shower, you can hold on to a grab bar until you steady yourself. In one study, participants with a grab bar were nearly 76% more likely to recover their balance than the participants who didn't have grab bars.

- Install grab bars. For help, ask a family member with experience drilling holes in a stud wall, use an online tutorial, or hire a contractor who can do it properly.

Home Safety for Seniors With Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia



If you or your loved one has Alzheimer's disease or dementia, changes in judgment or function may make it difficult to cook, take medications and perform other tasks. Wandering is also common among people with dementia. A senior who wanders away from home may get lost, putting them at risk of falls, pedestrian accidents and encounters with unscrupulous individuals.

Fortunately, there are several things you and your loved ones can do to make your home safer.



Install safety gates

Blocking exterior doors and stairways can prevent wandering and serious falls.

- Choose a sturdy gate and make sure it's installed correctly.

- If you rent a home and aren't permitted to make alterations, [use colorful netting](#) to block stairwells and doors.

- If you live with a family member, have them install deadbolts out of reach and lock the doors whenever you're home together.

Place deadbolts out of reach

It's more difficult to wander away if you can't bend down or stretch up high to unlock an exterior door.

- Leave at least one deadbolt unlocked when your loved one leaves the house. If there's an emergency, you'll be able to go outside or have emergency personnel come inside to help you.

Remove hazardous objects from your home

It's impossible to remove every potential hazard from your home, but you can have a loved one remove power tools, poisonous plants and harmful chemicals to avoid accidents.

- Store hazardous objects by locking them in a shed or detached garage.

- Alternatively, consider selling them, donating them to charity or passing them on to friends and family members.

Purchase a security system or alarm system

Many security systems include window and door alarms, along with smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and other features to keep you safe.

- Research which security system has the features you need at a cost you can afford.

Keep medication bottles in a locked cabinet or automatic dispenser

Dementia can result in confusion that may make it difficult to take medications as directed. As a result, many seniors with Alzheimer's disease and dementia [need help with medication management](#).

- To avoid serious complications, keep your prescription bottles in a locked cabinet.

- If you live with a loved one, ask them to give you each medication as scheduled.

- If you live alone, consider purchasing an automated medication dispenser that can be loaded with several medications and programmed to dispense medications at specific times, increasing safety.

Avoid using extension cords

Although extension cords are convenient, they also [increase the risk of trip-and-fall accidents](#). Seniors with dementia often take medications that can affect balance and

- Reconfigure your furniture and tables so you don't need to use extension cords.

Medical Alert Systems and Other Technology That Can Improve Home Safety for Seniors

Due to advances in technology, there are more options than ever for keeping your home safe. Some tools reduce the risk of in-home accidents, while others make getting help from loved ones or emergency responders easier and swifter.

Medical Alert Systems

What Are They?

Medical alert systems make it easier to ask for help in an emergency. In-home models typically have a base unit connected to a button you wear around the house. If you fall or have some other type of emergency, you don't have to worry about getting to a phone; simply press the button and wait for assistance. Several companies also sell wearable devices for you to use when you're shopping or doing other errands outside the house.

Depending on your budget, you may want to get a monitored or unmonitored medical alert system. With a monitored system, pushing the help button gives you access to a trained professional who can assess your situation and determine if they should call 911 or contact one of your loved ones. Unmonitored systems connect you directly to 911 dispatchers.

There are also models that have an "auto detect" feature, in which the device has a sensor that can detect a fall. This is especially helpful in the event that someone falls and is unable to press their button for help. This can ensure that help finds them, even if they are unable to call for help themselves.

How Can They Help?

Medical alert systems can help you contact first responders within seconds. If you have chest pain, fall or experience some other type of emergency, a quick response can make a real difference in the outcome. For example, some stroke treatments must be administered within a few hours of the onset of symptoms. If you can get help right away, you have a better chance of qualifying for these time-limited treatments.

Walk-in Tubs and Walk-in Showers

What Are They?

Traditional tubs have high edges, making it difficult for seniors with limited mobility to climb in and out. Walk-in tubs have low thresholds and watertight doors, making it possible to step into the tub instead of climbing. A walk-in shower is similar, as it has a low threshold. These showers also require no curtains or doors, making them much easier to enter and exit.

How Can They Help?

As you get older, you may find it difficult to lift your legs over the side of the tub or get into the shower without tripping or getting tangled in the shower curtain. Walk-in tubs and showers make it much easier to meet your basic hygiene needs without putting your safety at risk. If you struggle to stand for long periods, you may also benefit from the seat included in a walk-in tub. Instead of standing while you wash and rinse, you can sit comfortably and take your time.



What Are They?

A [stairway chair lift](#), or stairlift, is a [motorized lift](#) you install along a stairway. When you use the lift, you sit in the built-in seat, put on a seat belt, and ride up and down the stairs safely.

How Can They Help?

Stairlifts are ideal for seniors with mobility problems, heart conditions and respiratory conditions that make it difficult to climb upstairs. They're also well-suited to seniors who have poor balance or coordination and struggle to use stairs without falling. Instead of navigating a steep stairway, simply sit in the chair and ride to the top or bottom. As a result, chairlifts can help you avoid falls. If you have a heart or lung condition, using a chairlift may also help you avoid aggravating your symptoms.

Smartphones

What Are They?

A [smartphone](#) combines the capabilities of a mobile phone and computer in a single device. If you have a smartphone, it's possible to download a variety of applications (apps) to improve your safety. For example, several companies offer GPS tracking apps, which are ideal for seniors who may wander due to Alzheimer's disease or dementia. You can also find health trackers, communication tools and apps for medication reminders or performing other important tasks.

How Can They Help?

Smartphones have many benefits for seniors. They're small enough to fit in a pocket, which means you can carry your smartphone around the house and use it to call for help if you fall or have some other type of accident. If you lose service to your landline due to planned maintenance or inclement weather, you'll be able to use your smartphone as long as you charge the battery. You can also take your smartphone with you when you leave the house, improving safety if you go out for a walk or decide to run errands.

Additional smartphone benefits depend on which apps you download. If you decide to install a GPS tracker, your loved ones can find you if you get lost or need help when you're not at home. Medication reminders can help you avoid missed doses or [remind you to refill your prescriptions](#), ensuring that you get the right amount of medication each day. Health trackers are ideal for monitoring things such as heart rate and blood pressure, making it easier for your doctor to determine if you need additional tests or medications.

Smart Home Systems

What Are They?

Smart home systems allow you to control lights, appliances, thermostats and other devices using a tablet or smartphone.

How Can They Help?

If you have poor balance, arthritis or any other medical condition that affects your ability to move around safely, a smart home system can help you reduce your risk of injury. Instead of getting up and walking around every time you want to turn on a light or turn up the heat, you just use your tablet or smartphone to perform the task. The less moving around you have to do, the fewer opportunities you have to slip, trip on something or lose your balance. Using a smart home system can also help you stay as comfortable as possible as you age in place.



What Are They?

Safety sensors alert you, a loved one or a monitoring center whenever there's an emergency or the potential for an emergency. If you live alone, they can alert you to smoke or high carbon monoxide levels inside your home. For seniors who live with loved ones, they typically use safety sensors to alert loved ones of movement, making it easier to prevent wandering and reduce the risk of accidents.

How Can They Help?

Manufacturers produce several types of safety sensors. Listed below are the most common types of sensors, along with their potential benefits:

- **Environmental sensors:** These sensors can alert you to smoke, gas, carbon monoxide, flooding and severe temperatures, giving you an opportunity to summon first responders and move to a safer area before you become ill or injured.
- **Appliance sensors:** Installing sensors on your electric kettle, refrigerator and other appliances can help your loved one better understand your daily routine. This makes it easier to determine if you need assistance. For example, if you usually turn on the kettle by 8 a.m., an appliance sensor may alert a loved one if you haven't used it by 9:30 a.m. Once your loved one receives the alert, they'll know to check on you and make sure nothing happened to disrupt your routine.
- **Enuresis sensors:** [Incontinence is a sign of dementia](#) and several other medical conditions. Enuresis sensors detect moisture during the night, alerting your loved one that you may need assistance changing the sheets or getting up to go to the bathroom. You can also place these sensors on chair cushions, ensuring that you can get help as soon as possible. The less time it takes to change into clean clothing, the lower your risk of [incontinence-associated skin problems](#).
- **Occupancy sensors:** Even if you live with another person, they can't always be in the same room with you. They need to prepare meals, do laundry and take care of other household chores. To improve safety in your home, consider getting a bed occupancy or chair occupancy sensor. This type of sensor sends an alert if you get out of bed or leave your chair and don't return within a few minutes. You can also use an occupancy sensor to ensure you get out of bed each morning.

Your Home Safety Inspection Checklist

It's not always easy to spot hazardous living conditions, especially if you don't have formal safety training. We put together the checklist below to help you identify safety hazards in every room of your home, along with entrances, exits, driveways and other areas. You'll do a much more thorough job if you know what to expect before you start.

Home Inspection Checklist for Seniors

If you're like many seniors, you've chosen to continue living at home as you age, which requires identifying safety and accessibility issues in your home. When you're ready to conduct an inspection, you can use this checklist to make sure you don't forget about critical aspects of home safety, such as the condition of exterior steps or the availability of working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Once the inspection is complete, contact a licensed repair professional to address the most pressing issues.

Main Entrance

- Entryway has non-slip flooring
- Main exterior door has a security light
- Doorbell is easy to reach
- Entrance has enough room to set grocery bags and packages aside while opening the door
- Peephole is accessible to all residents, and also clean so residents can use it properly
- House number is clearly marked and visible
- All locks, bolts and doorknobs are secure and easy to use

Exterior Features - Driveway

- Driveway is free of defects that could cause residents to trip and fall
- Garage is in good condition
- Driveway is easily accessible and clear for visitors or emergency personnel
- Garage doors and lighting work

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Schedule a Professional Home Safety Inspection



In-home accidents can cause serious injuries, increasing your risk of health complications and leaving you with expensive medical bills. When it comes to safety, it's important to be proactive instead of reactive. To identify and correct hazardous conditions before they cause an accident, take a few minutes to schedule a home safety inspection. The companies below offer safety inspections in many areas of the United States.

**COMPANY
NAME**

WEBSITE

**CONTACT
INFORMATION**

STATES SERVED



AmeriSpec	amerispec.com	(844) 526-5232	New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming
HomeTeam Inspection Services	hometeam.com	(844) 969-0458	All states except Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wyoming
HouseMaster	housemaster.com	(800) 526-3939	Nationwide
National Property Inspections	npiweb.com	(800) 333-9807	All states except Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, West Virginia
Pillar to Post	pillartopost.com	(800) 294-5591	All states except Delaware, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, West Virginia, Wyoming

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Speak with a Family Advisor

Who are you looking for?

Full Name

Phone

Email