

elder home safety



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Elder Care Made Easier.

 **MedicalAlert**
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Helpful tips to increase safety for elders in and around the home

Many elderly are victims of accidents in their own homes, due to hazards that are easy to overlook, but just as easy to fix. Taking simple, commonsense steps to correct these problems can prevent injury, and make your elder's life easier.

Before evaluating your elder's home, make sure that you have their permission and cooperation. Involve them in the changes you are making by explaining the reasoning behind them, and being available to answer any questions they may have.

The following pages contain a list of changes that can be made in your elder's home to improve their safety and quality of life. While there are many suggestions here, keep in mind that there may be other necessary improvements that are unique to your elder.

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The Entrance



- Place deadbolt locks on the front and back doors.
- Install a burglar alarm if possible.
- Install peepholes on outside doors, at the proper height for your elder.
- Make sure the doorbell can be heard from all rooms of the house.

General Tips for the House

- Plan and practice an emergency escape route with your elder, in case of fire. This should include a safe meeting place outside the home.
- Subscribe your elder to a personal safety response service in case of emergency. They will receive an emergency call button to wear as a necklace pendant, on their wrist, or clipped to their belt. If they fall and can't get up, they can press the call button; that will automatically activate an emergency call for help over their telephone.
- Telephones should be in each main room, and should be low enough so they can be reached from the floor in case of a fall.
- Program telephones with emergency numbers: doctor, fire department, police, family contact, poison control, a neighbor, caregiver, and so on. Also, post a list of these numbers by each telephone.
- Make sure the ringer volume on the telephone is loud enough for your elder to hear, even when watching TV or listening to the radio.
- Make sure any door thresholds are low, and don't serve as a tripping hazard. If they are too high, remove them.
- Replace round doorknobs with lever-action handles.
- Remove interior locks on all doors to prevent your elder from locking him/herself in.
- If anything in the home is broken (window, stove, floor tile, door lock, etc.), fix or discard it.
- All appliances, lamps, and cords should be in good condition.
- If there are any exposed light bulbs, cover them with a shade or globe to reduce glare.
- Use light bulbs of the maximum wattage allowed by the fixture. If you don't know the correct wattage, use 60-watt bulbs.
- Have an electrician check the fuse box or circuit breakers to ensure that the house is wired properly.
- Protect your elder from electrical overload with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). GFCIs are especially important in the kitchen and bathroom.
- Be certain that no outlets or switches are unusually warm to the touch. If they are, stop using the outlet immediately, and call an electrician to check the wiring.
- Make sure all outlets and switches have cover plates.
- Make sure that extension cords are not overloaded.
- Replace any electrical cords showing signs of wear and tear.
- Cords should be placed away from high traffic areas, and out from underneath furniture and rugs (this is a fire hazard). Never run cords across walkways.
- Do not attach cords to the wall or baseboards with nails or staples. Use electrical tape instead.
- Make sure smoke detectors are located throughout the home, and are in perfect working condition. Check the batteries at least twice a year.
- Install radon and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Remove all poisons from the home.
- Close all rodent holes, and hire an exterminator if needed.
- Windows should open easily from the inside, with secure locks to prevent entrance from the outside.
- Put eye-level decals or reflector tape on glass and screen doors.
- Make sure the home thermostat is not set too high or too low, especially in summer heat and winter cold.
- Ventilate rooms properly, using windows or fans.
- Replace air filters often. Dirty filters will release dust and dirt particles into the air, which can adversely affect your elder's health.
- Do not allow others to smoke in the house.
- Remove all clutter: if something does not serve a purpose, get rid of it.

Stairways & Hallways

- All stairways and hallways should be well lighted.
- Install light switches at both the top and bottom of any stairs.
- Install light switches at both ends of long hallways.
- Install night lights as necessary.
- Make sure that any banister extends the full length of the stairs, and is fixed securely.
- Repair any steps that sag or wobble. Stairs should have even surfaces.
- If hardwood, steps should be adapted with non-skid strips.
- If carpeted, the carpet should be securely fastened, and free of holes or fraying.
- The edge of the steps should be easy to see. Avoid dark or patterned carpets.
- If there is a difference in step surfaces or riser heights, mark them and be especially careful when using these steps.
- Remove any protruding objects (hooks, shelves, large picture frames, and so on) from hallways.
- Remove throw rugs from any high traffic areas.
- Don't place items on stairs to be carried up at a later time.
- Keep stairways and hallways clutter-free.
- Consider installing gates on all staircases.





The Kitchen

- Make sure the sink, range, and countertops have adequate lighting. Install under cabinet lighting if necessary.
 - When possible, use a gas stove so that it's easy to determine if the stove is on (you can see the flame with a gas stove).
 - Make sure the gas range has an automatic shut-off feature, in case the pilot goes out. You can have someone from the gas company check this for you.
 - Make sure the kitchen ventilation system or range exhaust is functional.
 - If the stove has removable knobs, replace them with permanent knobs.
 - Make sure potholders and oven mitts are easy accessible, but located away from heat sources.
 - Make sure no towels or curtains are hanging near the stove, where they may catch fire.
 - Put all appliances, dishes, and silverware where they're easy to reach.
 - Install multi-level counters in the bathroom and kitchen for easier wheelchair access (if necessary).
 - Knives should be stored safely in their own drawer or in a block.
 - Use unbreakable dishes.
- The oven controls should be clearly marked and located on either the front or side of the oven, so you don't have to reach over the burners to operate the oven. If this is not the case, consider investing in a new appliance.
 - While cooking, have your elder avoid wearing loose sleeves, which can easily catch fire. Suggest that they wear short sleeves, or fasten long sleeves back with elastic bands.
 - Keep a fire extinguisher handy, and make sure that your elder knows how to use it properly.
 - Small appliances and their cords should be moved away from sink areas and hot surfaces, and should be unplugged when not in use.

The Bedroom

- Keep a working flashlight on the nightstand; check the batteries periodically.
- Keep a lamp and telephone on the nightstand.
- Fix the height of the bed so it is easy for your elder to get out of.
- Keep pathways clear around the bed, to the door, and to the bathroom.
- Use nightlights to illuminate the path between the bedroom and bathroom.
- Remove casters from any furniture.
- Use allergen-free bedding to reduce mite infestation and other allergy-causing agents.
- Make sure bedding is flame-retardant.
- DO NOT allow your elder to smoke in bed
- Remove any electric blankets and heating pads, to reduce risk of fire. If extra warmth is needed, have your elder use a hot water bottle.
- Clothing and stored items should be kept within easy reach for your elder.

Living Room & Family Room



- The light switch should be located near the entrance to the room.
- Make sure the furniture is solid and sturdy, and won't tip should your elder use it for support.
- Chairs and sofas should have sturdy armrests to add support when sitting down or standing up.
- Chairs and sofas shouldn't be too low or too deep. This will make it harder for your elder to get up once seated.
- Add cushions to chairs for increased comfort and safety.
- Remove casters from any furniture.
- Remove any glass-topped tables.
- Any wall shelving should be well secured, and not overburdened with items. If shelves are out of reach for your elder, consider adding lower ones.
- Any loose rugs should have non-skid backing, and should not be placed in high traffic areas. Check backing frequently and replace when necessary.
- If there's a chimney and fireplace, have it checked frequently to make sure it is free of leaves or other debris.
- Also have the fireplace checked by a professional for creosote buildup, which can lead to fires.
- Buy an all-in-one remote control for the TV and any additional electronics. Program it and show your elder how to use it.



Outside Areas & Garage

- Doorways, porches, steps and walkways should be well lighted.
- Add outdoor lighting that can be controlled by motion sensors.
- Railings, banisters, or fences should be present on balconies and porches.
- Install at least one entry to the home that does not have steps.
- Replace outdoor stairs with ramps if necessary.
- Make sure steps and walkway are in good condition. Repair any cracks or uneven pavement.
- Add handrails to outside steps.
- Paint edges of outdoor steps white, or use reflector tape so they're easier to see at night.
- Avoid placing sharp stones or other potentially dangerous items along pathways.
- Keep hoses away from walkways, and store garden equipment when not in use.
- Hedges and trees should not obstruct the view of the street.
- If your elder has a garage or work area, make sure it is well lighted. Install extra lighting if necessary, including a light switch located at the entrance.
- If your elder uses power tools (and can do so safely), make sure they are either double insulated or equipped with a 3-prong plug. This will reduce the risk of an electric shock.
- Use power tool guards to prevent injury.
- Any flammable liquids in the garage should be properly labeled and stored AWAY from heat sources.

Medication



- Store all medications safely (as instructed), and clearly labeled with doctor's instructions, contents, doctor's and pharmacy's contact info, expiration date, and patient's name.
- Consider using a weekly pill dispenser if multiple medications are taken daily.
- If children will often be in the house, make sure child-resistant caps are used on ALL medications.

The Bathroom

- The light switch should be located near the entrance.
- If necessary, install a nightlight, or replace current light switch with a "glow switch."
- The bathroom door should open outward.
- Repair any broken tiles.
- Replace glass shower doors with unbreakable plastic or shower curtains (which should be changed every six months).
- Remove or replace any bathroom accessories that are breakable (cup, soap holder, drinking glass, and so on).
- Add safety rails in the shower and tub, as well as just outside of it.
- All safety rails should be custom installed at the appropriate height.
- Affix non-slip strips to the bathtub floor.
- Install a shower seat if necessary.
- Install a hand-held shower nozzle.
- Affix non-skid bath mats to the bathroom floor.
- Clearly label all water faucets "hot" and "cold."
- Replace faucet handles with easy-to-grab levers.
- Set the water heater thermostat at 120 degrees F or lower to prevent scalding.



- Always have your elder check the temperature by hand before entering the shower or bath.
- Install multi-level counters for easier wheelchair access (if necessary).
- Add a safety rail near the toilet.
- Make sure toilet paper is easily accessible.
- Avoid use of electrical equipment in the bathroom as much as possible.
- When using electrical equipment, keep it away from water, and unplug it immediately after using.
- Make sure outlets are ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs).
- NEVER reach into water to retrieve an appliance that has fallen in, without first unplugging it.
- The bathroom should have a safe additional heat source, and a good ventilation system.

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