

Home Safety Inspection Guide for Seniors

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Covered in this guide:

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The term “aging in place” refers to remaining in your own home as you get older instead of moving to a nursing home, assisted living community or another residential care setting. For many seniors, aging in place represents an opportunity to maintain a high level of privacy and independence. It can also make it easier to manage your finances, as you'll continue to live in your own home instead of paying rent at a senior living community.

Although many seniors want to age in place, the physical and cognitive changes that occur with aging may make it challenging. The AGS Health in Aging Foundation reports that 40% of all older adults have balance problems, which can make it difficult to cook, bathe, get dressed, go outdoors and perform many other activities without falling. Balance problems are even more common in seniors with visual impairments, nerve damage, muscle weakness and problems with the inner ears.

Additionally, the following changes may make it hard to clean, prepare meals and perform other household tasks:

- **Osteoporosis/Shrinking bones:** In some seniors, the bones shrink and become less dense, increasing the risk of fractures.
- **Loss of muscle strength:** Weakened muscles can contribute to poor balance and coordination.
- **Memory loss:** Your brain undergoes physical changes that can make it difficult to perform household tasks safely. For example, you may forget to turn off the oven when you finish cooking.
- **Vision changes:** Cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and other eye conditions can make it difficult to navigate your home. These conditions may also increase the risk of accidents while you're using tools, knives and other potentially dangerous objects.

One way to reduce your risk of in-home accidents is to conduct a safety inspection and implement changes designed to make your home safer. Some hazards are easy to address, but you may need to hire a professional to handle wiring or plumbing projects. The following guide identifies some of the most common home safety issues facing seniors who want to age in place. It also offers recommendations for addressing common hazards and contains a list of professional inspection companies to contact if you need assistance.

How To Make Your Home Safer and Reduce the Risk of Falls

Homes of all ages, sizes and styles contain hazards that can increase the risk of falls. Many seniors also have balance problems or take medications that can cause dizziness and unsteadiness, making falls even more of a concern. You may think of falls as no big deal, but they can cause serious injuries. For example, about 20% of falls result in a head injury or broken bones.

Falls are also responsible for 3 million emergency room visits and 800,000 hospitalizations each year. Not only do falls put your safety at risk, but they can also leave you with high medical bills and make it difficult to stay independent. You may have an increased risk of falls if you have vision problems, foot pain, difficulty walking, poor balance or weakness in your lower body.

Reduce your risk of falls by following these tips to make your home safer and easier to navigate.

How to Make Your Home Safer and Reduce Your Risk of Falls	Why You Should Make the Change	How to Make the Change
Install Handrails	Walking up and down stairs without a handrail is a major risk factor for falls among seniors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Install handrails on both sides of each stairway- Make sure handrails are securely fastened to the walls

Keep Your Home Tidy

If your walkways are cluttered, you're more likely to trip and fall.

- Clear stairs, hallways and other walking paths.

- If necessary, remove some of the furniture from your home to give yourself more room to move around.

Use Nightlights

Walking through dark rooms increases the risk of falls, especially if you're disoriented when you first wake up. The risk is especially high for seniors with urinary urgency, as they may have to get up several times per night to use the bathroom.

- Add nightlights in the bedroom, bathroom and hallways.

Choose Safe Flooring

Some flooring materials are more slippery than others, making falls more likely. Many falls occur when seniors transition from carpet to another type of flooring.

- Look for slip-resistant options if you plan to replace any of your home's hard floors.

- To improve safety when you leave one room and enter another, have an experienced carpenter install transition strips between rooms.

- Remove any throw rugs that pose a tripping hazard.

Work with a Physical Therapist

Some risk factors associated with falls include poor balance, lack of core muscle strength and lower-body weakness. Over time, physical therapy strengthens your muscles, improves your coordination and reduces pain, all of which can help you avoid falls.

- Ask your friends, family and doctors for a referral to a skilled physical therapist who has experience working with seniors.

Purchase Shoes with Non-Skid Soles

Slippers are comfortable, but many styles have soles that increase your likelihood of slipping when walking on tile, vinyl and other types of hard flooring. Flip-flops and sandals may also slip off your feet while you're walking, causing you to trip and fall.

- Reduce your risk of falls by wearing comfortable shoes with rubber soles.

- Make sure each pair fits you well to reduce the risk of tripping over a shoe that slides out of place.

Make Sure Your Home Has Adequate Lighting

To reduce the risk of falls, it's important to see where you're going as you walk around your home.

- If you have trouble seeing when it's dark outside, have a qualified electrician install new light fixtures where needed.

- If needed, purchase floor or table lamps and add at least one to every room.

Reorganize Your
Home as Needed

If you have balance problems or leg weakness, it can be difficult to use a step stool safely.

- Reorganize each room so that you don't need a step stool to reach items you use regularly.

- In the kitchen, make sure you have plates, glasses, utensils, basic cookware and common pantry items within easy reach.

- If you decide to reorganize your closets, keep seasonal items on the top shelves and items you use more often closer to the bottom.

Safety and Security Following an Alzheimer's Disease or Dementia Diagnosis



Alzheimer's disease and dementia cause a wide range of symptoms that can make it less safe for older adults to remain in their homes. One of those symptoms is wandering, which stress or confusion from memory loss can trigger. A senior who wanders may become confused and have difficulty remembering how to get home, increasing the risk of injury.

Seniors with dementia may become confused even when they're in familiar environments, causing them to wander from room to room in search of other people or objects. If your home doesn't have appropriate safety features, the risk of falls increases. For example, if a senior may confuse the basement door with the bathroom door, they could fall down the basement stairs from just trying to use the restroom.

If you're concerned about safety after your loved one's Alzheimer's disease or dementia diagnosis, implement these recommendations:

How to Make Your Home Safer After a Dementia Diagnosis	Why You Should Make the Change	How to Make the Change
Block Off Stairways	Many seniors with Alzheimer's disease or dementia have problems with their balance and coordination, making stairs one of a residence's most dangerous features.	- To reduce the risk of serious falls, install a gate at the top and bottom of each stairway.
Cover the Doorknobs	Seniors who get confused may try to open doors that lead outside, increasing the risk of accidents.	- If you're concerned about wandering, cover each doorknob with a material that's the same color as the door. Covering a knob helps it blend in with the rest of the door, which may prevent a senior with Alzheimer's disease or dementia from turning it to go outside.

<p>Keep Cords Out of the Way</p>	<p>It's easy for people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia to trip over electrical cords stretched across hallways and other walking paths. Cords can also add to the confusion these conditions cause, further increasing the risk of accidents in the home.</p>	<p>- To reduce risk, keep electrical cords out of walkways.</p> <p>- If needed, use a cord bundler to keep cords behind or under furniture and out of the way.</p>
<p>Install Alert Devices As Needed</p>	<p>People in the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease or dementia may wander during times of stress or fear or when searching for something or someone. Preventing wandering at this stage of the disease is crucial for the safety of the senior.</p>	<p>- If wandering is a concern, install a device capable of alerting a loved one when someone with Alzheimer's disease or dementia opens an exterior door or gets out of bed or a chair without returning to it within a few minutes.</p>
<p>Remove Unnecessary Mirrors</p>	<p>Strategically placed mirrors can make your living space look larger, but they can also confuse seniors with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.</p>	<p>- If you have decorative mirrors in your home, consider removing them to prevent confusion from the senior seeing their reflection.</p>
<p>Change Your Wall Colors</p>	<p>Alzheimer's disease and dementia can make it difficult to distinguish horizontal surfaces from vertical ones. If your walls are the same or a similar color as your floors, it's even more difficult for your loved one to tell the surfaces apart.</p>	<p>- Hire a painter to add a fresh coat of paint to each room. Research shows that people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia tend to prefer auxiliary colors, such as gray, brown and violet. Bright colors may be too stimulating, so select your paint colors carefully.</p>

Label All Doors

If your loved one gets confused, they may not remember which door leads to which room. This can lead to increased levels of anxiety, making their Alzheimer's disease or dementia symptoms worse.

- Reduce confusion by labeling each door so they know what lies ahead. Make sure the text is large enough to read from several feet away.

- Try labeling drawers and kitchen and bathroom cabinets, as well.

Improving Senior Safety With Technology



Technology has made it easier to do everything from communicating with people in other countries to finding information about topics of interest. Seniors can also take comfort in knowing that technology makes it easier to prevent accidents and access help in the event of an emergency. Medical alert systems are one of the most well-known safety solutions for seniors, but you

may also be able to find medication dispensers, home sensors and other tools to make it safer to age in place.

Medical Alert Systems

Medical alert systems give you extra peace of mind by making it easier to request assistance from family members, friends and first responders. This type of system typically comes with a wall unit that syncs with wearable pendants or wall buttons, ensuring you can ask for help if you fall or experience some other type of emergency.

Types

If you purchase a monitored system, you can connect with an operator any time you press the help button. The operator then determines if they should contact emergency services or one of your loved ones to help you. Unmonitored systems allow you to connect directly with a 911 dispatcher.

Features and Benefits

- Ability to call for help even if you're not near a telephone
- Less time spent waiting for emergency assistance
- Dispatchers are available to keep you calm while you wait
- Some have an auto-alert, fall detection capability, so a call for help is placed if a fall is detected, but the alert button is not pressed

Sensors

Several companies make sensors designed to promote in-home safety for seniors. These sensors typically make noise or send an alert if there's an emergency or the potential for an emergency to occur.

Types

- **Appliance sensors:** If you live alone, it can be difficult for loved ones to know when you need help. One way to overcome this problem is to use an appliance sensor, which sends an alert when you use certain kitchen appliances. If you normally make breakfast first thing every morning, you might want to put one of these sensors on your fridge. Your loved one will receive an alert if you don't open the fridge at your normal time, letting them know that you might need assistance.
- **Incontinence sensors:** As you age, you may develop bladder problems that lead to urinary incontinence. If you lose bladder control, it's important to change into clean clothes as soon as possible, as prolonged contact with urine irritates the skin and increases the risk of pressure ulcers. Incontinence sensors alert your loved one that you may need assistance. If you experience incontinence at night, an incontinence sensor can make you safer by eliminating the need to try to get out of bed, change your clothes and put on clean sheets by yourself.
- **Environmental sensors:** Time is of the essence when it comes to escaping unsafe environmental conditions, but you can't plan your escape unless you know that dangerous conditions exist. By the time you smell smoke or notice that flood waters are entering your home, it could be too late to get out without sustaining an injury. Environmental sensors alert you to the presence of smoke, carbon monoxide, natural gas and other dangerous conditions.
- **Occupancy sensors:** As noted above, some companies make sensors designed to alert a loved one if you get out of bed or get up from your chair and fail to return within a certain amount of time. This makes it easier for loved ones to know when you may need assistance.

Features and Benefits

- Less time spent waiting for help from loved ones
- Ability to program sensors to fit your routine
- Reduced risk of injury

Stairlifts

A stairlift is attached to stair treads with sturdy clamps, allowing it to move freely. If you want to use the stairs, simply sit in the attached chair and glide up or down.

Types

The two main types of stairlifts are straight and curved. Straight ones work in stairways without curves, while curved models are designed for stairways with landings, turns or any changes in direction.

Features and Benefits

- Reduced risk of falls
- Padded chair for comfort
- Less exertion for seniors with heart and lung conditions

Automated Medication Dispensers

Automated medication dispensers help seniors avoid forgetting their daily medications and prevent them from taking too much or too little of each drug. The user loads the pills into the dispenser, and then it dispenses them at specific times each day. For example, you may take medications in the morning and before bedtime.

Types

Medication dispensers are classified according to who's responsible for organizing the medications. One model uses a robot to sort pills, while pharmacy personnel fill the other models and then deliver them to the user. You can also purchase an automated medication dispenser that requires you to do your own medication organization.

Features and Benefits

- Less time spent managing medications
- Reduced risk of medication errors
- Some models hold up to 90 days' worth of daily medications
- Can lock to ensure that no one is tampering with the medication
- Live support available with certain models
- Can alert a caregiver if doses were missed

Walk-in Showers and Tubs

Walk-in showers and tubs have low thresholds, making it easier to get into and out of them even if you have poor balance or weakness that makes it difficult to lift your foot over the edge of a regular tub or shower.

Types

Walk-in showers can be classified as recessed, floating or corner. Recessed models typically replace older bathtubs. They have one glass screen, making it possible to enter on either the right or left side. Floating models also let you enter on either side of the shower. Each one has a single glass panel, which fits nicely with modern bathroom decor. Corner models have two glass screens and can fit into any corner.

Some of the most common types of walk-in tubs include soaking tubs, bariatric tubs and hydrotherapy tubs. Soaking tubs are deep enough to cover your upper and lower body. Bariatric tubs are larger than standard tubs, making them more comfortable for seniors who need extra room to move around. They also have higher weight limits. Hydrotherapy tubs are similar to soaking tubs but have built-in jets to ease muscle pain and stiffness.

Features and Benefits

- Low thresholds
- Easy to clean
- Reduced risk of falls
- Multiple styles available

Smart Home Systems

Smart home systems let you manage appliances, HVAC systems and lights with an internet-connected mobile device.

Types

- **Plugs:** Smart plugs let you turn connected devices on and off even when you're not home.
- **Thermostats:** With smart thermostats, there's no need to get up and down every time you want to adjust the temperature. These high-tech tools make it possible to control your thermostat from your tablet or smartphone.

- **Appliances:** Smart appliances let you control refrigerators, washers, dryers, dishwashers and air conditioners with your mobile device. For example, you can set the air conditioner to 70 degrees when you leave the house for a doctor's appointment. Before you leave the doctor's office, you can turn it down to 65 degrees to ensure the house is cooler by the time you get home.
- **Bulbs:** You can program smart bulbs to turn on and off at specific times, making your home less of a target for burglars. Putting the lights on a timer can also ensure your home is well-lit before it gets dark each evening.

Features and Benefits

- Reduces the need to get up every time you want to turn on a light or adjust the thermostat, which may lower your risk of falls
- Energy savings
- Increased security
- Ability to manage connected devices from anywhere with internet or mobile phone service

Smartphones

Having a smartphone is like having a miniature computer at your fingertips. Not only can you use a smartphone to make calls and send text messages, but you can also use it to browse the web or download apps. You can use mobile apps to perform a variety of safety-related functions, from tracking the whereabouts of a senior who wanders to setting reminders to take your medications.

Types

Most smartphones run either the Android or iOS operating systems, but Nokia has Windows-based models. No matter which operating system you use, your smartphone can connect to the internet, download applications and perform various other functions.

Features and Benefits

- Ability to call for help from any location with service
- Offers an extra layer of protection if your phone service goes out

- Thousands of apps available for health tracking and communication
- GPS tracking is available for seniors who wander

Home Safety Inspection Checklist for Seniors

Before you conduct a home safety inspection, it's important to take some time to familiarize yourself with common hazards and learn how to spot them. The checklist below is organized by room, making it easier to identify indoor and outdoor hazards. Keep this checklist with you when you're ready to look for potential safety issues in your home.

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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Professional Home Inspection Resources

One of the main reasons to perform a home safety inspection is to prevent injuries that can cause chronic pain and make it difficult to maintain your independence as you age in place. Instead of waiting until an accident occurs, contact one of the professional inspection services below for guidance on making your home safer.

**Inspection
Company**

Website

**Phone
Number**

Locations

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
AmeriSpec	amerispec.com	(844) 326- 5292	All states except Alaska, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Massachusetts, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming
Pillar To Post	pillartopost.com	(800) 294- 5591	All states except Delaware, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, West Virginia, Wyoming
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
HouseMaster	housemaster.com	(800) 526- 3939	Nationwide

Expert Reviewer

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Deidre has worked in the healthcare field for over 35 years and specializes in Geriatrics. Deidre is a nurse who holds a certification from the National Academy of Certified Care Managers and is a Certified Dementia Practitioner. She has worked across all healthcare settings, with a concentration on the community and helping older and disabled adults age in place. She has worked on NIH grant-funded program evaluation projects and considers herself a life-long learner. Deidre is a valued team member at The Hartford HealthCare Center for Healthy Aging in Hartford, CT.