

Home Remodeling for Comfort and Safety

As you get older it may get harder to walk and move easily. You may have less strength and stamina, and your vision and hearing may not be as good as they used to be. Your body does not control your temperature as well as it used to, so being in a very hot or very cold place may be dangerous. There are many things you can do to improve your home's safety and comfort.

General

- Consider shifting bedrooms or other living areas to the first floor of the home so that everything is on one level. This keeps you from having to go up and down stairs and lowers the chance that you will fall.
- Increase lighting, both room lighting and in areas like kitchen counters.
- Consider using ramps instead of steps to get to the garage or other outside areas. Use different colors or patterns to mark the edges of steps to help prevent falls. Make sure handrails are available and secured tightly to the wall.
- Make sure your mailbox is at a comfortable height so that you don't have to bend down or reach awkwardly to get mail.
- Widen doorways to 36 inches if needed so that you can get a walker or wheelchair through all doors.
- Install levered door handles instead of knobs if arthritis in your hands is a problem.
- Keep electric cords and oxygen tubing out of areas where you might trip on them.
- Make sure that all doors and windows are easy to open and to lock.
- Install glow-in-the-dark switches in bedrooms, baths, and hallways. Have light switches at both ends of stairs and hallways.
- Install programmable thermostats for heating and cooling. This can save money as well as provide more comfort.
- Make sure that chairs have sturdy arms and have seats at least 18 inches above the floor.
- Check for slippery flooring. For example, make sure there are no loose rugs on hardwood or vinyl floors. Use nonskid mats on floors that may get wet.
- Use flat-finish paint, flooring, and countertops to eliminate glare.
- Consider an emergency call or emergency response system. These can be installed in the home or worn as a wrist watch, pendant, or belt clip.
- Make sure your outside address is marked in large, clear numbers and that the area is well lit so emergency personnel can find the house quickly. You can also get a flashing porch light that helps them find your house as fast as possible.

Bathroom

- Make sure bathrooms have enough turn-around and transfer space for a walker or wheelchair (36 inches by 36 inches).
- Install lever faucets rather than knobs.
- Set your hot water heater thermostat below 120°F (49°C). You can also put in antiscald valves that reduce water flow if it gets too hot.
- Install grab bars at the back and sides of shower stalls, as well as the tub and toilet. Grab bars provide stability and a strong handhold. They must be long and wide enough to grasp easily, and they should have a nonslippery grip.
- Install a walk-in shower stall. Put a seat in the shower. Shower stools must have rigid seats and backs and the legs should have rubber tips.
- Use a handheld shower to direct water over your body while you sit on a stool or in a tub.
- Buy a toilet seat that makes the seat higher, or install a new tall toilet.

Kitchen

- Install pull-out or rotating shelves in kitchen cabinets.
- Make sure that cabinet knobs or pulls are easy to grasp and that drawers don't stick.
- Install a stove with controls in the front so you don't have to reach across a hot cooktop.
- If a top freezer is hard for you to reach, you can get a side-by-side refrigerator/freezer.
- Use different colors or patterns to mark the edges of kitchen counters to help prevent drops and spills.

Getting the work done

You, a family member, or a friend may have the knowledge and skills needed to remodel. If you are going to get a contractor to do the work, get more than 1 estimate for the cost of the work.

You may have to make choices about which changes to make to stay within your budget. Every house and every person's needs are different. Do the kind of remodeling that will be most useful for you.

To get more information on hazard-proofing your home, or to request the Consumer Product Safety Commission's booklet of safety tips for older people, contact:

- US Consumer Product Safety Commission
800-638-2772 (TTY 1-800-638-8270)
<http://www.cpsc.gov>

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