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FALLS AND OLDER ADULTS: HOME SAFETY TIPS

Many older adults spend most of their time at home, so it's not surprising that one half to two thirds of all falls occur in or around the home. Certain risk factors in the home environment may contribute to about half of all home falls. Making changes to existing homes, or building features into new construction will help create a safer environment.

Changes to a home should improve accessibility and adaptability, and incorporate features of universal design.

- **Improved accessibility** means wider doorways and clear passage for wheelchairs through the home; lowered countertops, sinks and cabinets; placing light switches and outlets where they can easily be reached, and installing grab bars.
- **Adaptability** changes are those that can be made relatively quickly, without major re-design or construction. Grab bars also fall under this category, as do handrails for stairs.
- **Universal design principles** are built into new construction. A home built according to these principles will include floor plans and fixtures that can be easily used and adapted for all ages and levels of physical ability.

Before making changes to the home, review it room by room. Common hazards that can be changed include tripping hazards, lack of stair railings or grab bars, slippery surfaces, unstable furniture, and poor lighting.

In the kitchen:

- Items in cupboards and cabinets should be low enough to reach easily.
- The oven and refrigerator should open easily.
- Create a space where you can sit to prepare food.
- Use a sturdy step stool with side handles.

In the bathroom:

- Evaluate how easily you can get into and out of the bathtub.
- Install a shower seat. It allows you to shower without getting tired or risking a fall. It also eliminates bending to wash feet or shave legs.
- Install grab bars where needed.

In the bedroom:

- Install a light switch close to the bed or place a lamp within easy reach.
- Pick up clutter from the floor.
- Limit the use of extension cords and fasten them to baseboards with tape designed for this purpose.



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mssc@minnesotasafetycouncil.org

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In closets:

- Arrange items you use frequently within easy reach.
- Lower the closet shelves if need be.
- Keep the floor free of clutter.
- Provide lighting, particularly for a walk-in closet.

Entrance to the home, doors:

- If the entrance to your home requires you to step up, can you manage it easily? Consider having a ramp installed if necessary.
- Have solid, non-stick surfaces inside all entrances to keep your footing secure.
- Ensure that there's enough space to move around while opening or closing your doors.
- Install motion-sensitive lights around entrances to light your way at night.

Floors

- Cover floor surfaces with non-slip or non-skid materials.
- Remove scatter rugs or secure them with two-sided tape.
- Wipe up spills immediately.

Hallways, Steps, Stairs

- Keep hallways and stairs in good condition and free of clutter.
- Hallways and stairs should have smooth, safe surfaces.
- Steps should be big enough for your whole foot.
- Install handrails on both sides of the stairway, attached securely to wall studs. Handrails should be rounded and no more than 1 1/2 inches around where you grab them. They should extend about 12 inches beyond the top and bottom steps.
- Consider whether you would benefit from building a ramp to replace the stairs or steps inside or outside your home.

Lighting

- Light switches and outlets should be easily accessible.
- Install nightlights to light your way from the bedroom to the bathroom.
- The lighting in each room should be sufficient for the use of the room and bright enough to ensure safety.

Use our interactive Falls Prevention checklist for seniors at <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/falls/>. You can also print out a fall prevention checklist, available in portable document format (PDF) at <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/fallcheck.pdf>.

Additional resources:



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Centers for Disease Control at [http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.h](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.html)
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.html>

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (info on home accessibility remodeling design and funding) at <http://www.mnhousing.gov/>

Acknowledgments:

[Administration on Aging](#)

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

[American Association of Retired Persons \(AARP\)](#)

[Rehab Engineering and Assistive Technology](#)



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