



Making your home safe and preventing falls

Simple adjustments to your home can make it a safer environment. Our room-by-room guide shows you how.

Accidents can happen to anyone, but factors such as an increasing loss of mobility, aches and pains, taking medication, long term conditions, forgetfulness and disorientation increase the risks for all people, of all ages.

Given that more accidents occur at home than anywhere else, it makes sense to take precautions. A few simple changes can make a big difference.

Four of the major triggers for people losing their independence are falls, floods, fires and “wandering”. By making some small changes around the home these things can be avoided. Adaptations need not be expensive.

Throughout the House – general advice

- Keep everywhere tidy and clutter-free - Remove rugs if you can and small pieces of furniture which can be tripped over. Tidy away electric cables.
- Raise lighting levels – use additional standard lamps to read by and to light dark corners. Maximise natural light by increasing the window space – e.g. remove pelmets, pull curtains right back, clean windows, cut back or remove trees/branches outside.
- Fit smoke alarms – sometimes the local fire brigade will provide them free – give them a ring to see if they do this in your area. Also remember to replace the batteries (or ask a family member to help you with this) and check that they are working.
- If you have a gas heater in the living room or bedroom use a carbon monoxide detector.
- Install flood detectors in case taps are left running - A device like the Magiplug allows water to reach a certain level, then releases it to prevent overflow. There is also an overflow water level alarm available which activates alarms if a bath or sink is about to overflow.
- Supervise the use of any new equipment, such as stair-lifts – People can generally manage old skills, but find it difficult to learn how to safely use something new.
- If possible use plain carpet on the stairs and floors: Patterns cause confusion: sudden changes in tone and colour can look like a change in level or a step and can make people more prone to falling.

In the Bathroom

This can be a particularly dangerous room because of the risk of slipping and trying to find the toilet while half-asleep.

At night it is a good idea to keep a light on in the bathroom/ toilet. Use a low energy bulb but do not use sensor-motion lights in here. If someone falls asleep while on the toilet and the light suddenly goes on or off it can give them a shock and cause them to fall.

Install a contrasting coloured toilet seat and grab rails at the toilet and bath: Choose strong colours, as they help navigation around the room, especially as bathrooms often have plain white suites and tiling.

Use non-slip mats or textured inserts in the bath and make sure the mat outside has a non-slip backing too.

In the Bedroom

Remember the reasons a person may want to get out of bed. E.g. going to the toilet or fetching a glass of water. Make this easier-

- Keep a plastic tumbler of water by the bed within easy reach.
- Make the bathroom visible and accessible. If you have an ensuite leave the door open to it, or you can leave the bedroom door open with lights on in the corridor or bathroom itself. There are items of electronic equipment which will turn a light on when you get out of bed, and bedside table lamps that come on when you touch them so you do not have to fumble to find the switch.
- If you have bed rails make sure these are in the right position and do not present a hazard if the person tries to climb over them to get out.
- Install sensors - there are pressure-sensor mats available that are placed under the mattress or pillow that can alert someone when the person gets up.
- If you have a gas heater use a carbon monoxide detector.

Kitchen

An obvious risk in the kitchen is fire, but there are also hazards such as knives and kettles of boiling water.

- Provide an electric kettle that switches off automatically, and use a kettle-tipper to make pouring safer.
- You can fit an isolation valve to a gas or electric cooker- This prevents the cooker being turned on and left on accidentally. A local electrical or gas engineer

should be able to advise you.

- Fit a heat detector (an alternative to a smoke detector), which will not go off if you burn the toast!.

In the Sitting Room

It is a good idea to keep on top of tidying and not to leave newspapers or other clutter lying around, and ensure there are no trailing cables or mats with curling edges.

You can locate furniture so that you can hold onto it as you move around.

Be careful if you have rugs on top of carpets and ensure that they are firmly in place.

If you have a gas heater in the living room use a carbon monoxide detector.

Front and rear entrances with steps

Steps at the front and rear can be real hazards. Making access to your house and garden easier and safer will keep you independent.

- If you have just one or two steps you can fit vertical handrails at the side of the doors.
- If you have more steps you may want to have a fixed handrail fitted alongside the steps, or have a ramp installed with a handrail.
- Whatever you do at the front door you should ideally do at the back door as well.
- In addition there are a number of easy to install security items that can be used at the front and back doors. Ask your local community police service to call and advise you.
- If you need to be alerted when someone goes out there are basic alarms that go off when someone opens the door.
- You can also get some that activate a voice message as you go past which you record yourself, such as: "Don't go out now, it is raining" when someone approaches the door acting as a deterrent for someone who might wander.

Stairs

Getting up and down stairs may get more difficult as we get older but it is good to use the stairs for as long as possible to get the exercise and to keep mobile.

- If you have a single handrail you can install a second one on the other side – this is a logical and very helpful solution.

- You can have a stairlift installed but these are expensive – be very careful that you get impartial advice and avoid having something that does not meet your needs. E.g. a stairlift that starts a few steps up, or one that does not go right to the top, or only goes up a straight flight to a landing and not round a corner.
- Make sure stairs are well lit at the top and bottom, and do not leave items on the stairs which you may trip over. Take care not to trip over pets on the stairs – anywhere else for that matter!

Outside space

It is good to make use of outside areas and to access your garden – however the garden, uneven paths and steps, slippery surfaces, sheds and garages can be hazardous.

- Remove clutter in sheds and garages and keep spaces clear for walking.
- Make sure things are safe on shelves and not likely to fall down.
- Make sure hoses are wound up and not left out.
- Where possible, enclose the garden with fencing and gates – which will also increase security
- Put up handrails or posts to grip wherever there are steps.
- Make sure you hold on to a rail when using steps and put things like washing into a bag you can carry with one hand so you can hold on.

Who can help?

People who meet the Council's criteria for needing help should be able to get an assessment by an Occupational Therapist (OT) working for social services.

An OT will visit your home and can arrange for minor adaptations, such as handrails, through social services. You may be eligible for a means-tested grant to help pay for adaptations. An application form should be available from the grants department of your local authority. Some charities may help with filling in the forms. Ask at your local library or Citizens Advice Bureau.

For information on where to get equipment in your local area or for more information on electronic items, Telecare and local support services, contact Going For Independence, a not-for-profit organisation providing home assessments and information on equipment and adaptations.

Tel: 01287 204204

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