

# Home Safety Tips for Seniors



Home safety for senior citizens has never been more important. In the age of COVID-19, we are all spending much more time than usual at home. Below are easy safety tips to ensure your senior family members are safe at home.

## Reduce the Risk of Falls

Every 11 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries for seniors, but there are several things you can do help your loved one [reduce the risk of falls](#).

- **Remove or replace throw rugs.** Throw rugs are easy to trip on, but you can reduce the risk of tripping by replacing them with larger area rugs, rugs that have non slip backings, adding a rubberized rug pad underneath them, or removing the rugs altogether.
- **Repair uneven flooring surfaces and walkways.** Uneven surfaces in floors can create a tripping hazard. These are commonly found in areas where flooring transitions from

one material to another, such as from wood to carpet. Outdoors, there may be uneven steps or cracks in the cement that should be repaired.

- **Remove clutter.** Excess clutter around the home can create more opportunities for falls to occur.
- **Check electrical cord placement.** Extension cords that are placed in walkways or lamp cords that run behind furniture can create a tripping hazard if someone needs to walk in the areas where the cords are located. These should be relocated if possible.
- **Wear non-slip footwear.** Wearing non-slip footwear can make a huge difference in fall prevention.
- **Use a mobility aid device.** For many seniors, using a cane, walker, or other mobility aid can make it easier for those with mobility issues to get around.

## Make Your Loved One's Home Accessible

As seniors age-in-place, it can become difficult to navigate stairs and walkways in their homes, but there are things you can do to improve accessibility and make their homes safer.

- **Evaluate the stairs.** Many older adults may find it challenging to access the upstairs of a two-story home. And it can become unsafe for some seniors to continue to go up and down stairs unassisted. Make sure stair railings are secure, and if your senior is struggling with the stairs, it may be time to [invest in a stairlift](#) to provide unhindered access to the home.
- **Check wheelchair accessibility.** Many homes weren't built to accommodate the space required for a wheelchair to pass through them. If your senior's home has narrow doorways or halls, it may be time to do some renovating and widen them to prevent injuries caused by running into doors or walls in tight spaces.
- **Replace round doorknobs.** For many seniors, it can be difficult to open doors with round doorknobs, especially in cases of arthritis or mobility limitations. Replacing round doorknobs with lever-style doorknobs can make it much easier for seniors to get in and out of rooms.

## Evaluate the Bathroom

Approximately 80% of falls occur in bathrooms, according to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but there are things you can do to make bathrooms safer.

- **Install grab bars.** Installing grab bars or handrails in bathrooms can make it easier for seniors to get in and out of the bathtub safely and without assistance.
- **Consider a walk-in bathtub.** In addition to grab bars, installing a walk-in bathtub may be a great option for some seniors who find it difficult to step in and out of a traditional bathtub. For extra protection in the bathtub, use slip-resistant bathmats.
- **Eliminate slippery floors.** Replacing slippery tile flooring with a non-slip product can help prevent slipping on wet floor surfaces and falling.

## Improve Fire Safety

Seniors, especially those who live alone, may have difficulty getting out of their homes quickly during a fire. There are steps you can take to prevent fires from happening.

- **Check smoke detectors.** Check smoke detectors every year and replace batteries with fresh ones. It's also a good idea to install a carbon monoxide detector as an additional safety measure.
- **Check fire extinguishers.** Make sure there is a working fire extinguisher easily accessible in the home.
- **Avoid space heaters.** Space heaters can pose a fire hazard. It's best to avoid them altogether, but if you must use one, turn it off before going to sleep and make sure it's at least three feet away from any curtains, bedding, or furniture.
- **Avoid using candles.** A study by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) found that there are approximately 22 home fires caused by candles per day in the United States. If your seniors use candles, they should be placed away from combustible materials and not left unattended.
- **Check electrical cords.** To reduce the risk of fire, check all appliances and lamps for signs of frayed or damaged cords, and make sure surge protectors are not overloaded.

## Make the Bedroom Safer

There can be unsafe conditions in bedrooms, which could contribute to safety issues.

- **Use bed-assist bars.** If it is difficult for your senior to get in and out of bed, consider purchasing a bed assist bar.
- **Make adjustments to the bed.** If your senior struggles to get into and out of bed, you may want to adjust the bed height. A good bed height for most seniors is between 20 and 23 inches off the floor. If falling out of bed is a concern, installing bed rails may reduce the risk.
- **Consider purchasing a bedside toilet.** Having a bedside toilet can be helpful for seniors with mobility issues who need to get up during the night to use the restroom.
- **Keep a phone near the bed.** Keeping a cordless phone and emergency numbers accessible from the bed enables seniors to make or answer calls without going across the room or into another room. This is especially helpful at night or in case of an emergency.

## Evaluate the Lighting

Many seniors have difficulty seeing things in dark rooms, so it's important to evaluate the lighting in your senior's home to ensure safe movement during the evening hours.

- **Install motion-detection lights.** Motion-detection lights are great options for those who need additional lighting but don't need to have extra lights on all of the time.
- **Replace insufficient fixtures.** If your senior has fixtures that don't work well or provide very little light, consider replacing them with newer fixtures.
- **Replace light bulbs.** Replace any light bulbs that have burned out throughout the home.

- **Use nightlights.** Nightlights can illuminate the room for seniors who need to get up during the night, especially if they sleep in a very dark room, and they need to get up to use the restroom. Some nightlights are designed to only turn on when the room becomes dark.

## Make Adjustments in the Kitchen

Kitchens can have some elements that can cause safety concerns, so you may want to make some adjustments.

- **Lower high items.** Seniors who need to stand on chairs or ladders to reach high shelves or cabinets to access items run the risk of falling. It's best to move commonly used items to lower cabinets and shelves where they can be within easy reach. If your senior must climb up to reach things, consider purchasing a small step stool with one or two steps.
- **Replace faucets.** If your senior has faucets that are difficult to use or require twisting and turning to turn on the water, you should replace them with a single-lever-style faucet. This allows seniors with mobility limitations or arthritis to quickly and safely turn the water on and off.

## Improve the Home's Security

While you're considering the safety issues inside your senior's home, don't forget the ones that effect outdoor home safety and property protection.

- **Keep walkways well-lit.** Installing lighting along outdoor walkways can help seniors have adequate lighting if they need to go outside in the evening.
- **Invest in a security system.** According to a University of North Carolina Charlotte study, 60% of burglars planning a break-in would be deterred by the presence of an alarm system. Security system options could be anything from a basic security system that alerts emergency services to a system with doorbell cameras and video recording features.
- **Add a peephole.** If your senior doesn't have a peephole in the front door, then you should consider adding one so your senior can see who is at the door before answering it.
- **Secure the mail.** Purchasing a locking mailbox or installing a mail slot in the door can prevent mail from being stolen and help protect your senior from identity theft scams.

It's important to do whatever you can to keep your loved ones safe to reduce their risk of injuries and improve their safety. And the best thing is, these are things that will continue to benefit your senior family members for many years to come.

Sources:

<https://www.ncoa.org/news/resources-for-reporters/get-the-facts/falls-prevention-facts/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6022a1.htm>

<https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Top-fire-causes/Candles>

<https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/CandleSafetyTips.pdf>

<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2017/crime-in-the-u.s.-2017/topic-pages/burglary>

<https://airef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BurglarSurveyStudyFinalReport.pdf>