



# HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

Use this checklist, from Home Instead®, to help determine if your senior's home is safe from hazards that could jeopardize well-being and independence.

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## Checklist:

- Do throw rugs create a tripping hazard? Is the carpet torn? **(1)**
- Is the room cluttered with clothing, magazines, newspaper or other items? Is there too much furniture for the space? **(2)**
- Does the senior lack access to a telephone or cell phone, especially at night? **(3)**
- Is there enough light? **(4)**
- Is the bed too high or low? **(5)**
- Do tangled electrical cords obstruct pathways? **(6)**
- Does the furniture provide proper support, if needed? **(7)**

## Suggestions:

1. Remove throw rugs or use double-sided tape or a rug pad to secure the rug to the floor. For small tears, a little glue or carpet staples can fix the problem.
2. It might be a good time to work with your senior and clean out closets and drawers of items he or she no longer wears or uses. For other items, build or buy shelving for closets to store sweaters, blankets or shoes.
3. Consider a cordless phone. If the senior is not agreeable to having a phone in the room, or he or she doesn't own a cell phone, suggest an emergency alert system. An internet search for emergency alert or medical alert systems will provide you with a variety of options.
4. Nightlights are a good option for dark rooms at night. If the senior likes to read in the bedroom at night or turns on the light in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, make sure the bulb wattage is high enough (within allowable limits) to properly illuminate the room. Rope lighting is another good option for hallways that connect the bathroom and bedroom.
5. The bed is too low if the senior's knees are above the hips when sitting on the bed. Bed risers under bed legs can raise the height. The bed is too high when legs do not touch the floor when sitting on the edge of the bed. Remove the bed frame or use a lower profile mattress or box springs.
6. Use extension cords to run electrical cords behind furnishings. Rearrange furniture that must be plugged in to areas near an outlet. Consider a power strip where several cords can be plugged into one long power source.
7. Make sure bedroom chairs are the proper height, so the senior's feet touch the floor. Chairs should have sturdy legs and arms.

## Checklist:

- Are grab bars available near the tub, shower and toilet? **(1)**
- Is the floor slippery? Is there a lack of bath mats? **(2)**
- Is the bathtub too high? **(3)**
- Is the toilet the correct height? **(4)**
- Is there the potential for bath water to be too hot? **(5)**
- Are medications stored properly: not too high or too low for the senior to reach? **(6)**
- Are mobility and joint problems making it difficult for the senior to reach into overhead cabinets, comb his hair or lift her leg to get into a bathtub? **(7)**

## Suggestions:

1. Loose towel and curtain rods could be a sign that an older adult is grabbing on to these for support. Adding grab bars near shower/tub units and the toilet can help prevent falls and other accidents.
2. Add a rubber mat or adhesive non-stick decals to the bottom of a tub. Check online or at a bathroom or discount store to find what you need.
3. If the bathtub is too high, such as a claw foot tub or antique tub, add a tub transfer bench. Check online or at a medical supply store for various options.
4. Add a raised toilet seat for stools that are too low. Contact a plumber about installing a lower profile stool if your senior's toilet is too high.
5. Set the water thermostat to 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.9 degrees Celsius) so the water in the shower and sink faucet do not exceed dangerous or uncomfortable levels. Another good idea is to make sure the hot- and cold-water faucets are clearly labeled. Painting parts of them red or blue will help distinguish them.
6. Make sure medications are stored in cabinets that are easy to reach. If the cabinet is too high, an older adult might have problems reaching into it. If it is too low, the senior could have trouble bending down to find the medication. Consider a medication organizer for pills that can be set on a countertop or shelf.
7. Perhaps your senior could use assistance at home if the effects of aging are making personal care difficult. A non-medical in-home care company such as Home Instead Senior Care may provide the support to keep an older adult independent for as long as possible.

**Checklist:**

- Is there too much clutter and not enough space to move around furniture? **(1)**
- Is furniture unstable? **(2)**
- Can the senior reach the light switch to turn it off or on? **(3)**
- Is there adequate lighting? **(4)**
- Do throw rugs and electrical cords pose a tripping hazard? **(5)**
- Is the floor uneven or is carpet torn? **(6)**
- Is the room temperature too hot or cold? **(7)**
- Does glare from the windows make it difficult for a senior to see? **(8)**
- Do the conditions of aging make it difficult for a senior to get out of a chair? **(9)**

**Suggestions:**

1. Organization is the key to preventing too much clutter. It might be a good time to work with your senior to downsize and eliminate bigger pieces of furniture. Add shelving, bookcases or a magazine rack to store newspapers, books and magazines that otherwise would be on the floor.
2. Sit in chairs to see if arms or legs are wobbly. Try gluing legs or arm rests. Or, if more extensive repairs are needed, locate a furniture repair service representative. If the chair is too low, add a cushion or pillow on the seat to raise the height. A chair that is too high, or without arms to provide support when the senior rises, should not be used.
3. Add a “clapper” light switch to control lamps or check out other remote control switching options. Check online or at your local department store. Sometimes, rearranging furniture can allow quick access to wall switch or lamps.
4. Increase wattage to allowable limits in lamps and lights. Add additional lamps, or contact an electrician about installing overhead lights.
5. Remove throw rugs. If carpet is necessary, installing low-pile rug can be better than shag. Having carpet stretched or removed can eliminate bumps. With the help of extension cords, run electrical cords behind furniture.
6. For small tears, a little glue or carpet staples can fix the problem. For uneven floors, consult a contractor or your local home improvement store. There are ways to even floors through the use of compounds and plywood.
7. Install lock-in switches on thermostats to control the temperature and help prevent furnace fires.
8. Check out heat-control window film, thermal curtains or solar shades. Visit home improvement and window covering businesses to learn more.
9. Make sure the chair is sturdy and the proper height with arm rests that can help support the senior. If you're concerned about an older adult's safety, remember that a caregiver/companion can help serve as a second set of eyes for an older adult in the home.

**Checklist:**

- Is there a working smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector in place? **(1)**
- Is there adequate light at night? **(2)**
- Does the senior have trouble finding the bathroom at night? **(3)**

**Suggestions:**

1. Install new smoke detector batteries once a year. Pick a date, like a birthday or the change to daylight-savings time, and make sure all of the smoke detector batteries in the home are replaced. The National Fire Protection Association in the U.S. and the Canadian Fire Safety Association in Canada recommend replacing carbon monoxide batteries and alarms according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
2. Night lights are an ideal solution for dark hallways. Search online to find a variety of lights, including LED options that are just right for an older adult. Rope lighting is another good option for hallways that connect the bathroom and bedroom.
3. Some seniors, particularly those with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia, may become confused at night and have difficulty getting to the bathroom. Nightlights can help. So, too, can a caregiver companion who would be available 24/7 to ensure that a senior is safe.

## Checklist:

- Are cabinets too high or low? **(1)**
- Is there clutter on countertops or throughout the kitchen? Are pathways obstructed? **(2)**
- Is there adequate light for cooking? **(3)**
- Are dangerous chemicals and cleaning materials secure? **(4)**
- Is the floor slippery? **(5)**
- Is there spoiled food in the refrigerator? **(6)**
- Is emergency contact information within easy access? **(7)**
- Is the senior at risk of harming herself with a sharp utensil or by causing a fire? **(8)**

## Suggestions:

1. Move items to the shelves closest to the counter that are the easiest for a senior to reach. Install hooks in the walls for pots and pans a senior frequently uses.
2. Using a “Lazy Susan” can help organize items on a countertop. Move kitchen table closer to counter for additional work space. Or use an island for added workspace. Eliminate excessive furniture to add space. Remove a leaf from the table and push it closer to the wall.
3. Increase light wattage to allowable levels. Many options exist for under-counter lighting including battery-operated pucks. Or, contact an electrician for under counter or overhead lighting.
4. Household kitchen cleaning and other supplies could pose a danger to older adults, particularly those with Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia. Consider higher storage or locked cabinets if you are concerned an older adult is in danger.
5. Encourage your older adult to clean up spills immediately and never walk on a wet floor. Suggest comfortable shoes that fit well or socks with a non-skid sole. If possible, change flooring to one with a less slippery surface.
6. The dangers of eating outdated or spoiled food can be many including food poisoning. If an older adult is unable to do so, help him or her go through a refrigerator weekly and look at the dates on food items such as meat, eggs and milk. Toss those items that are unsafe. If a senior typically has a lot of leftovers, divide into freezer bags or containers, and freeze for future use.
7. A refrigerator is a good place for emergency contact information. So is a senior’s wallet, billfold or purse. Go to [SeniorEmergencyKit.com](http://SeniorEmergencyKit.com) for the tools necessary to create a wallet card for emergency contacts, an important contact information worksheet, and a medication tracker worksheet.
8. Make sure the senior’s kitchen has a working fire extinguisher. If you are concerned about an older adult’s safety, remove all dangerous utensils from the kitchen and arrange for the assistance of a caregiver companion who could help a senior with such tasks as meal preparation.

## Checklist:

- Is there adequate light on basement stairways? **(1)**
- Are there sturdy handrails for the stairway? **(2)**
- Are the steps too steep or slippery? **(3)**
- Does the last step blend in with the floor? **(4)**
- Are the pathways cluttered? **(5)**
- Is laundry detergent in bottles or boxes too heavy to lift? **(6)**
- Has detergent spilled on the laundry room floor? **(7)**
- Does the senior have to carry baskets of laundry up and down stairs? **(8)**

## Suggestions:

1. Increase wattage to allowable limits, and add overhead and wall lighting, if necessary.
2. Add at least one railing the entire length of the wall. Ideally, there should be a railing on both sides. Consult with a credible contractor to make sure he – or you – install a railing that is safe and up to code.
3. Add adhesive stair treads or a carpet runner. Check with department, carpet or home improvement stores.
4. Paint the bottom step a different color to better distinguish the last step from the basement floor.
5. If stairs become a dumping ground for items such as shoes, remove and organize in a closet or elsewhere in the basement.
6. Divide laundry detergents into smaller containers or bottles.
7. Encourage seniors to immediately clean up spills and wear shoes or socks with non-skid soles in the laundry room.
8. If possible, move laundry to the main living area. Or, consider hiring a caregiver companion, who can assist with many of those household tasks that seniors could be struggling to do.

### Checklist:

- Do the stairs into the garage have secure railings? **(1)**
- Is trash piling up? **(2)**
- Are power tools and lawn chemicals secure? **(3)**
- Is the garage secure? **(4)**

### Suggestions:

1. Like basements and entryways, steps leading out of a garage should have at least one sturdy railing, ideally two.
2. Make sure enough trash containers are available to hold trash between times when collection services pick up. Keep trash just outside the garage to avoid attracting bugs and mice. Make sure your senior has help moving trash to the curb if needed.
3. Power tools and toxic lawn chemicals could be lethal for some older adults, particularly those with dementia, as they could become confused about how to safely use them. If you are concerned, have those items removed from the garage. Or, if a senior can still help, lock up the items until he can participate with the assistance of a family member or friend.
4. Many older adults fear break-ins, and this can be a legitimate concern. Remind your senior to always keep the garage door down. And, if the garage has a separate door, from the outside, keep that locked as well.



## Checklist:

- Do steps have proper handrails? **(1)**
- Are steps too steep, cracked or uneven? **(2)**
- Are driveways or walkways snow- and ice-covered? **(3)**
- Is there adequate lighting at night? **(4)**
- Is your senior loved one at risk of wandering? **(5)**
- Can your senior hear the doorbell? **(6)**

## Suggestions:

1. Stabilize unsteady railings. If they are missing, install at least one and preferably two.
2. Proper handrails are a must where stairs are steep. Have damaged or broken steps and sidewalk repaired. Consider planning out an alternate route to and from the home for your senior. Contact your local city or county government about repairing a sidewalk or the end of a driveway.
3. Make sure your senior has someone to scoop his or her walk, or maintain the yard. Work out an arrangement with a neighbor or snow removal/yard service. Use snow melt when necessary.
4. Add an outdoor light if one is not available. Motion-activated lights may provide an older adult much comfort and security.
5. Install barriers and fences in the yard to help ensure a senior doesn't wander. Place larger flower pots near small openings to help re-direct. Create inviting areas including benches where an older adult can sit and enjoy nature.
6. A device that enables a ringing doorbell to trigger a flashing light -- including existing house lamps and special strobes for rooms where lamps aren't generally used -- lets your loved one know if someone is at the door.

*Source: Includes information from the University at Buffalo Home Safety Self Assessment Tool.  
Online at <http://agingresearch.buffalo.edu/hssat/>*

For more information, go to **MakingHomeSaferforSeniors.com**