

Plan for living safely at home

Home safety is important for anyone and should generally be well planned. A specific planning approach can consider the needs of older adults and offer a great advantage allowing for elders to either live with you or extend their ability to stay in their existing homes as aging naturally affects their physical capability and safety. This is often termed “aging in place”.

A first step in developing a plan is a review of how any aging adult lives at home, either with family or alone. A simple checklist will illustrate how an older adult’s reduced reach, strength, balance, vision and obstacles may get in the way of safe living at home.

Physical layout

- ✓ **Check walking routes.** Make the walking path at home bright and clear. Light up dark or shadowy areas to make it easy for aging eyesight to see the way from room to room as well as avoid accidental trips that could lead to big consequences in the elderly.
- ✓ **Make entries safe.** Allow enough space around doors and look for trip hazards. Security gates, shoe racks, umbrella stands and the like often interfere with easy access for elderly that may be challenged. Keep them clear.
- ✓ **Make entries easy.** Check door handles and mark keys to simplify getting in the door. Plan to provide seating for an older adult to easily to put on/off shoes or grab a bag without reaching to the floor.
- ✓ **Think about identification.** Anticipate and avoid potential confusion with graphics. Make fixtures easily distinguishable with ideas like red-blue color on water taps to avoid mistakes or burns.
- ✓ **Think about safety.** Allow for assistive devices like handrails to help older adults. Special areas to consider are the bathroom, bedroom and kitchen areas where more preventable accidents occur.
- ✓ **Check for easy use.** Ergonomics is both important and a bit special for aging adults. Raised toilet seats may make bending and access easier while bright reading lights can make simple improvements to a living space.
- ✓ **Emergency information.** It’s critical for an older adult to have emergency contact and medical information easily and quickly accessible. Complete a Personal Emergency Information worksheet with a senior loved one and place at any of nightstand, refrigerator or front door clearly marked for First Responders.

Daily living at home

- ✓ **Take care of clutter.** Remove items that get in the way. Explore where too many bottles are on a counter in the bathroom or collections of magazines in a living area could cause difficulties for an older resident including spills, tripping or other danger.
- ✓ **Look for damage.** Loose towel rails and worn chair backs provide clues that aging adults are grabbing on for stability. Worn paint or door damage can indicate someones difficulty to access areas that are tight or dark.
- ✓ **Change appliances.** Plan ahead with an electric boiler or induction cook top instead of stove top pans. Many can be safely operated and have automatic time-outs to avoid accidents in the home where a person may become forgetful.
- ✓ **Reorganize.** Put things in reach. An aging adult may take some convincing, but life will be easier and safer if they don't need to bend or stretch to reach hidden items stored inconveniently. The key is about making their life easy and convenient. Your family may even discover some forgotten treasures hidden away!
- ✓ **Use automated reminders.** Explore the use of mobile phone calendars, timers, alarms or other devices that help aging family members to take medicines or remember events.
- ✓ **Check expiration dates.** Make sure your loved one stays healthy and is eating well. It's not surprising to find old food in the refrigerator and expired cans in the drawers because labels are often small and hard to read. This is a job children enjoy doing to show their care.

When you take the time to review living conditions with all your family members, a family elder will be pleased to remain living at home with the understanding their needs are cared for. Knowing that everything is in order will make them feel more secure. You, too, may worry less with an increased confidence that an aging adult's living condition matches their specific needs.

S+ has both products and solutions to help homes adjust to the needs of aging family members.

Help aging family members live with respect, safety and extending their ability to **age in place - at home!**