

Aging in Place in Your Home Sweet Home

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According to the *Journal of Housing for the Elderly*, “Aging in Place” is not having to move from one’s present residence in order to secure necessary support services in response to changing needs.

Aging in place means living where you have lived for many years: your home. Some 70% of seniors spend the rest of their life in the place where they celebrated their 65th birthday, as noted in the seniorresource.com web site.

While we all cherish our independence, vision, hearing, dexterity, strength and endurance changes may mean adjustments. The design of our home is important to how we manage daily activities. Homes that were perfectly convenient at age 55 can cause problems in later years, as diminishing abilities make daily routines more challenging without some design modifications.

Stairs present the most common hazard. Statistics show that aging people who live on one level have a far greater opportunity to actually stay in their homes. Is there a first floor room that can be converted to a bedroom, allowing you to spend most of your time on one floor? Simply moving some furniture around could make your home much safer and more accessible.

Some simple alterations can prevent one-third of home accidents. These changes increase safety, as well as enhance the comfort of your home. The alterations will also increase the likelihood of remaining independent in your home. Use a check list to identify problem areas in every part of your house.

Make a list of your daily activities and what you like to do most. If you really enjoy cooking or baking, and intend to remain very active in the kitchen, make that room a top priority in your planning.

Home Safety checklist:

Answer the following questions to identify problems for each area of your home. If your hearing is an issue, alarms, doorbells and phones should be a priority. If arthritis or rheumatism might become a problem, look at the way your cupboards and doors and windows open. Think of ways to make the future easier.

WINDOWS/DOORS:

- Are windows/doors easy to open and close?
- Are locks sturdy and easy to operate?
- Are doors wide enough for a walker or wheelchair?
- Are door thresholds raised too high?
- Is there space to maneuver while opening/closing doors?
- Does the front door have a view panel at the proper height?

FLOOR SURFACES:

- Is the surface safe? Non-slip?
- Are there scatter rugs or door mats that may be dangerous?
- Are there changes in levels that need to be marked in some obvious way?

STEPS/STAIRWAYS/WALKWAYS:

- Are they in good repair with handrails on both sides?
- Is there grasping space for both knuckles and fingers on railing?
- Are there stair treads deep enough for your whole foot?
- Would a ramp be feasible in any area?

APPLIANCES/KITCHEN/BATH:

- Is arrangement convenient and safe?
- Can oven/refrigerator be opened easily?
- Are stove controls easy to use and clearly marked?
- Is counter height/depth good for you?
- Can you sit while working?
- Are cabinet knobs easy to use?

- Do you have convenience items such as a garbage disposal? Trash compactor? Hand-held shower head?
- Can you get in and out of tub/shower with ease?
- Do you have a bath/shower seat and grab bars?
- Is hot water heater regulated to prevent scalding/burning?

ELECTRICAL OUTLETS/SWITCHES/ALARMS:

- Are outlets/switches easy to turn on/off?
- Are outlets properly grounded?
- Are extension cords in good condition?
- Do you have smoke detectors and fire extinguishers?
- Do you have an alarm system?
- Is the telephone readily available for emergencies?
- Is the telephone equipped for hearing enhancement if necessary?
- Can you hear the doorbell in every part of the house?

LIGHTING/VENTILATION:

- Is lighting sufficient for safety and the purpose of the area?

- Do you have night lights where needed?
- Is area well-ventilated?

DRIVEWAY/GARAGE:

- Is parking space available?
- Is it convenient to entrance way?
- Does garage door have an automatic opener?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS?

- Are lights glare-free?
- Are chairs at appropriate heights? Are you able to sit/stand with ease?
- Are tables secure enough to provide support if leaned on?
- Do low-lying objects present a tripping hazard? (coffee tables, step stools)
- Are there pets in the home that might be a tripping hazard?

Review your goals and daily activities and compare it to the list of alterations that you've identified. Develop a plan that will make living in your home easier, safer and more satisfying. The changes you make to your home will benefit everyone by improving the quality of life for all members of the household, making your house your home sweet home. ➤



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