

How To Fall Proof A Home

“Aging in place” allows people to remain in their own homes by adapting their environment.

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Falling can become your worst enemy as you age. A fall can lead to broken bones and other health complications. However, there are small changes that can be made to mitigate fall risks.

The reasons for falling may be physical or environmental — that is, certain medical conditions or medications may increase the likelihood of a fall, or the design and style of your living space may no longer be safe.

“Some changes—like replacing a standard toilet with a comfort height model, adding grab bars and a hand shower with seat to an existing bathroom or adding pull-down accessories for your kitchen wall—can be reasonably affordable,” said [Jamie Goldberg](#), a

certified, aging-in-place specialist. “Others, like creating a barrier-free shower or home entry, widening doorways and remodeling a kitchen for accessibility will involve more time, skill and investment.”

The concept of “aging in place” is to allow people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible by adapting their environment to their changing physical abilities.

“I design homes for seniors and those who have special needs to make them safer and extend their quality of living,” said [Leslie Markman-Stern](#), an interior designer. “I start with conducting a safety assessment of their home by going thru each room and making recommendations. One room I pay particular attention to is the bathroom. I design ADA compliant (American with Disabilities) bathrooms so if they are currently using wheelchairs or walkers they can navigate the space more easily.”

To make a bathroom safer, Ms. Markman-Stern installs non-skid floors, puts in additional light for those who have low vision, creates walk in showers (no thresholds) for greater accessibility to prevent falls, installs blocking in walls to support grab bars, designs a vanity cut out so if they are in a wheelchair they can still use the sink, and uses specifying levers instead of knobs for faucets and handles so that if they have arthritis they can use the faucets or pulls on drawers more easily. She also designs kitchens and other rooms of a house to make them safer.

Ms. Goldberg, suggests similar changes to a kitchen as one might consider for the bathroom. These include non-skid mats in front of the sink, levers instead of knobs, and increased lighting.

“I helped my father-in-law, a stroke victim and Vietnam war vet, modify his bathroom and it was one of the most satisfying professional experiences of my career,” said Ms. Goldberg.

Some home safety changes can be as simple as removing clutter, taping down loose rugs, keeping a flashlight handy before using the stairs at night, and using installing nightlights in other rooms.

In addition to make your living space safe, experts recommend a visit to the doctor to create a fall prevention plan. This plan will begin with a review of current medications to see if side effects are making balance worse. Health issues with eyes and ears and cause balance to be off and the doctor will need to assess this.

“Physical activity can go a long way toward fall prevention,” states the [Mayo Clinic](#). “With your doctor’s O.K., consider activities such as walking, water workouts or tai chi — a gentle exercise that involves slow and graceful dance-like movements. Such activities reduce the risk of falls by

For those avoiding physical activity because of a fear of falling, consult your doctor to see if a physical therapist can help. “The physical therapist can create a custom exercise program aimed at improving your balance, flexibility, muscle strength and gait,” states the Mayo Clinic.

Simply changing your footwear can decrease your risk of falls. Experts recommend shoes that fasten on and no high heels or flip-flops.

Whether investing in something as small as a new pair of shoes or a night light to hiring an interior designer to install a new bathroom and kitchen, the cost is buying independence and reducing the risk of falls.