



# A Guide to **Aging in Place**

How to Plan Now So You Can Stay in Your Home Later in Life



Let's start talking about living.<sup>™</sup>

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### What Is Aging in Place?

When you imagine your golden years, do you picture growing older in your own home? Aging in place is just that. It's living in your own home in later life, as long as you are able. Aging in place doesn't mean isolation—you may need social support and care services to help you live safely and independently, but these services are readily available in the home setting.

The **American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)** reports that nearly 90% of seniors want to stay in their own homes as they age. AARP research further notes that 69% of aging parents and 75% of their adult children think about the parents' ability to live independently in the years ahead. But certain aging and health challenges can affect everyday activities for older adults inside and outside the home. A bit of planning and ensuring your living environment has been adapted to your abilities—including necessary home modifications—is key to aging in place successfully.

### Unsafe Aging Conditions

As we age, balance may become a significant issue due to a variety of factors, including physical weakness, medications, and cognitive and visual impairment. Our home, normally a source of comfort for us, can become hazardous without a fall prevention strategy. Right at Home suggests you proactively and regularly assess your home for anything that might be a health risk. In addition, you should determine whether you can do the following in a safe manner:

- ▶ Drive
- ▶ Use public transportation
- ▶ Maintain and keep up the home
- ▶ Manage your health
- ▶ Go up and down stairs
- ▶ Get in and out of bathtubs and showers
- ▶ Get up from and sit down on beds, chairs and toilets
- ▶ Reach up and bend down to retrieve items from closets and shelves



## Are You at Risk for a Home Accident?

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- History of falling
- Inability to get up after a fall
- Extended periods of solitude at home
- Balance and/or vision impairment
- Cognitive problems, including dementia
- Multiple prescription drugs that affect motor skills and/or balance
- Limited mobility
- Various chronic health conditions (Parkinson's disease, severe arthritis, stroke, etc.)



**90%** of all seniors want to stay in their own homes as they age.\*

\*According to research by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

Be sure to discuss any of these risk factors with your physician. Aging in place requires an individualized plan that carefully considers your functional abilities and any hazards and obstacles in the home. If you want to age in place—safely and comfortably—making practical home modifications may be the most beneficial solution.

# Making Home Safer

**Basic Home Modifications** - If you are relatively healthy but are starting to experience or are anticipating aging changes, these types of home modifications could help as you age.

**Needs-Based Home Modifications** - If you have changing or chronic health conditions that affect balance or mobility, you will need a thorough assessment of how you function in your home.



## Basic Home Modifications

Add lighting

Remove slick flooring

De-clutter high foot traffic areas

Consider prioritizing any needed modifications of the home to avoid overwhelming disruption. In addition, if you're a family caregiver, it's important to include your older loved one in the decision-making process on any home modifications.

## Needs-Based Home Modifications

Add bathroom grab bars

Widen doorways

Use a personal emergency alert system

Remove steps from entrances

Convert doorknobs to handles

Raise electrical outlets

Lower electrical switches

# Why Modify or Remodel Your Home to Age in Place?

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Each municipality has different building permit requirements based on local ordinances, so the homeowner or hired contractor should check with the Planning Department section of City Hall's website or call for advice. Some homeowner association (HOA) covenants require prior approval before renovations to a condominium, villa or townhouse, so check with the HOA beforehand.

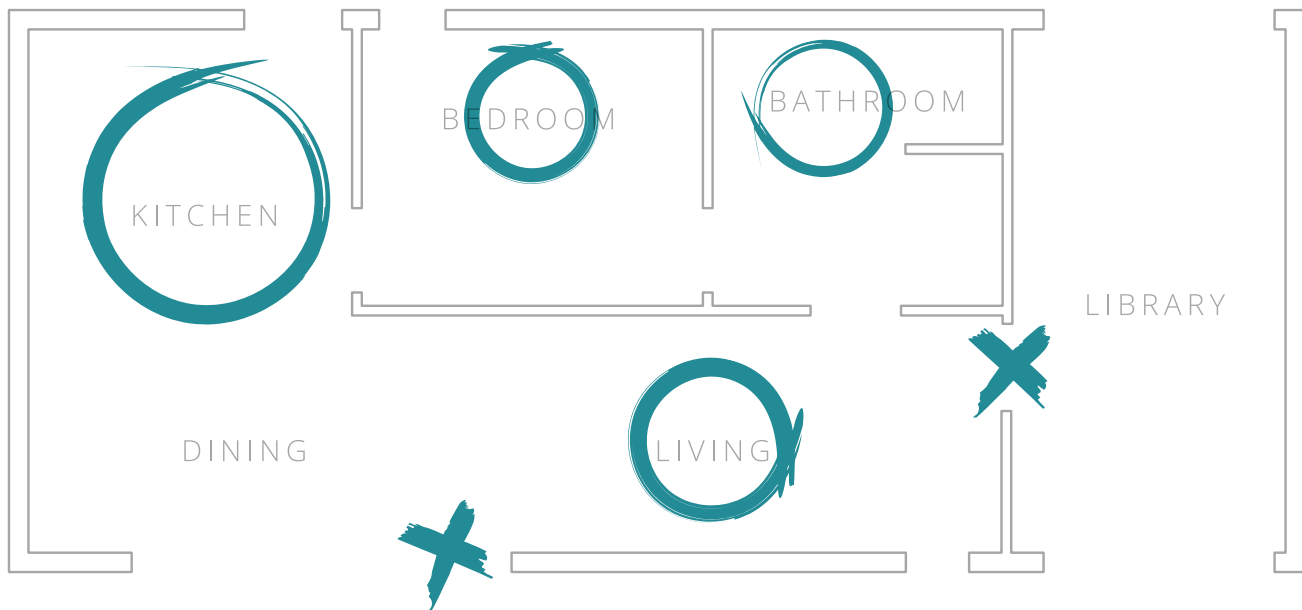
- ▶ Increased safety
- ▶ Flexibility for changing health needs
- ▶ Greater freedom to live independently
- ▶ Peace of mind for family caregivers
- ▶ Easier use by all family members



## Tips for Adequately Assessing Your Functional Environment

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- ▶ Make note of any balance or mobility problems in relationship to environmental conditions such as lighting, floor surfaces and furnishings.
- ▶ Contact your doctor or geriatrician if there is any issue that interferes with mobility and/or safety.
- ▶ If a balance or mobility issue is detected, your physician could recommend physical therapy or occupational therapy, including a modification to the home.



## Spotting Home Hazards

Potential safety hazards and obstacles in your home can be easy to overlook, but they can also be easy to fix.

Hazards	Solutions
Inadequate Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep lights on in rooms most often occupied.</li> <li>Use brighter bulbs and more light fixtures.</li> <li>Consider a night light for dark passageways.</li> <li>During the day, open curtains and shades to let in more sunlight.</li> <li>Install extra lighting for pathways from the bedroom to the bathroom and by steps/stairways.</li> </ul>
Sliding Throw Rugs Upended or Curled Carpet Edges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use only slip-resistant rugs and mats (add nonskid matting to existing rugs, if needed).</li> <li>Add carpet tape to keep carpet edges from curling.</li> </ul>
Clutter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear all pathways and steps of objects and furnishings.</li> </ul>

# Any Difficulty at Home With . . .

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## Walking around?

- ▶ Wear shoes and slippers with nonslip soles that grip the floor.
- ▶ Consider using a cane to help maintain balance.

## Transitioning to the toilet?

- ▶ Consider an elevated toilet seat and grab bars.

## Getting objects from kitchen cabinets and closet shelves?

- ▶ Store everyday dishes and kitchen supplies within easy reach.
- ▶ Keep items no lower than waist level and no higher than shoulder height to avoid excessive bending, stooping and reaching.

## Getting up from the bed?

- ▶ Move the bed against the wall to prevent the bed from sliding.
- ▶ Replace the existing mattress with one thinner to lower the bed height or with one thicker to raise the bed height.
- ▶ Attach a handrail near the bed.

## Walking up and down steps or stairs?

- ▶ Don't rush; take your time and look directly at each step.
- ▶ Don't carry large packages or baskets that obstruct your vision.
- ▶ Watch as you firmly place each foot on the steps.
- ▶ Clear steps of any items.
- ▶ Add handrails to all stairs.
- ▶ Consider installing extra lighting at the top and bottom steps.

## Getting in and out of the bathtub or shower?

- ▶ Consider a tub/shower chair and grab bars (towel bars are not designed for this).
- ▶ Place nonskid rubber mats or decals on the tub/shower floor.

## Getting up from chairs?

- ▶ Use sturdy chairs with armrests.
- ▶ Add firm foam pads to chair and sofa seats.



# Making Change Happen

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Change is never easy, but understanding the four stages of behavior during change can be helpful for you and your family as you discuss home modifications.

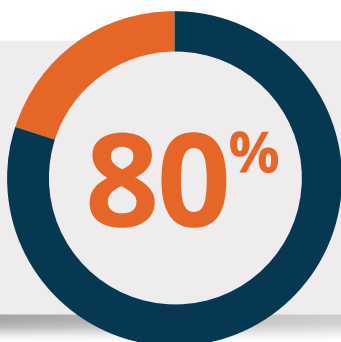
- 1 Stage 1: Pre-Contemplative/Unaware**  
You are not interested in change. You have no intention of doing anything differently. You tend to avoid information, discussion or even thinking about change and the need for it. At this stage, it's useless to attempt modifications.
- 2 Stage 2: Contemplative**  
You start to think about the possible need for changes. You recognize there is a problem, and that you can and should do something. There may be a trigger event, such as a worsening of balance and/or a bad fall. At this stage, you are open to information options and specific strategies.
- 3 Stage 3: Action**  
In this stage, you make real changes or modifications.
- 4 Stage 4: Maintaining**  
By this stage, you are working to consolidate any changes in your behavior, to maintain the "new" status quo and prevent a worsening of your condition. You are receptive to positive reinforcement.

When working as a family to discuss future needs for home modifications, our **RightConversations<sup>SM</sup>** series is a practical approach for effective communication between you and your loved ones. Access RightConversations at [rightathome.net/right-conversations](http://rightathome.net/right-conversations).

## Stay Active

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You've likely heard the saying, "Use it or lose it." It turns out that it's true! Sitting on the sofa too much leads to weak muscles. You may think that you can't build muscles as you age, but this is not true. Strength and balance exercises help increase leg strength and improve balance. While we do lose muscle as we age, exercise can partially restore strength and flexibility.



of seniors identified housing features such as nonslip floor surfaces as especially important in later years.\*

\*According to research by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

# Visiting Your Doctor

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As we age, the need for preventive care and frequent medical examinations becomes even more important. Regular medical, dental and vision checkups are essential to living independently.

- ▶ If applicable, optometrists might recommend updating eyeglasses during annual examinations.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor about any balance and mobility concerns. Discuss any problems with dizziness, joint pain, weakness in legs, worsening gait or balance, etc. The doctor will evaluate the root cause(s) of the problem and recommend treatment.
- ▶ If you are unsteady, a cane or walker might be a good idea to increase stability. Selecting the right device and correct size is critical, as are instructions and training in proper use. A physical therapist can help select the right cane or walker for you and teach you how to use it correctly and safely.
- ▶ Have your doctor or pharmacist review your medicines to see if any might make you dizzy or sleepy. This should include both prescription and over-the-counter medicines. Drugs may cause side effects that can interfere with aging in place.

## Health Care Professionals

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Various health care professionals will likely play a role in your care. Here are a few of the more common professionals and how they work with you.

**Geriatricians** - Physicians (internist, family medicine practitioner) who are specifically trained in the special needs of elders (memory loss/dementia, urinary problems, fall prevention, multiple medications, etc.). To find a geriatrician, call your state's medical society.

**Occupational and Physical Therapists** - Help evaluate an individual's function in the home and work with the elder's primary care doctor to design comprehensive safety recommendations.

**Geriatric Care Managers** - Typically a nurse or social worker who works with older adults and their families to help with caregiving. Facilitating communication among doctors, the elder and family, geriatric case managers help determine the types of services needed, help with medical management and provide updates about the senior's health. Care managers are ideal for family caregivers providing long-distance care, particularly those living more than an hour away. Contact the Aging Life Care Association at [aginglifecare.org](http://aginglifecare.org) to find a care manager in your area.

# Home-Monitoring Technology

Continuing advancements in technology allow more and more seniors to stay comfortable and secure at home, while providing peace of mind for family members. Home-monitoring technologies are becoming more affordable and user-friendly, including:

**Sensors** - Installing sensors throughout the home can detect a change in routine, abnormal movements and falls. Sensor mats under mattresses monitor sleep patterns, heart rate and breathing.

**Wearable Health Devices** - Health-centric technology worn as wristbands, smartwatches, biometric clothing, goggles and more measure everything from blood pressure to vision.

**Video Monitoring** - You can check in with relatives and friends via technology like Facebook Portal, Amazon Echo or Google Nest.

**Mobile Apps** - Using smartphones and other mobile devices, apps can remind you to take your medication, measure glucose or skin temperature on the spot, or adjust hearing volume.

**Telemedicine** - Roving robotic devices allow doctors to remotely complete real-time medical appointments. At a distance, clinicians can also track heart rhythm paths for patients with heart disease or who are at risk for stroke or heart attack.

**Home Automation** - Smart auto-set devices simplify daily tasks such as opening or securing windows and doors, turning off appliances, lowering countertops and shelves, and adjusting home temperature.

**Fall-Detection Devices** - Personal emergency response system (PERS) and passive sensors assess whether a fall has taken place and alert others that an individual has fallen.



# Remodeling a Home

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A number of items should be considered when remodeling a home. For best results, families should focus proposed modifications on the functional problems of the person living in the home. If eyesight is failing, look for home changes that help vision. If arthritis impairs mobility, focus on modifications that support safe movement.

## General Household

Adapt the ground level of the home for possible one-level living.

Add sensors to outdoor light fixtures to automatically turn lights on at dusk and off at dawn and/or turn on when motion is detected.

## Bathroom

Arrange for the shower to have a low threshold for easier entry and exit.

Place bathroom cabinets and shelves within easy reach.

Add grab bars at the back and sides of the shower, tub and toilet.

Choose out-swing, in-swing or pocket doors depending on mobility and access issues.

Be sure the shower and bathtub contain permanent or removable seating to help with balance or transfer.

Reinforce bathroom walls with wood studs or other solid surfaces so grab bars can be installed throughout the room.

Allow for turnaround and transfer space for a walker or wheelchair (36 inches x 36 inches).

Use anchored, decorative grab bars as towel bars.

Convert to comfort-height toilets that are 2 to 3 inches higher than traditional models.

Outfit the shower with a hand-held or adjustable shower head.

## Seating and Chairs

Assist with the ease of getting up by using only chairs with sturdy armrests, and ensuring the chair/sofa arms extend to the front of the seat.

Be sure seating is at least 18 inches off the floor.

## Entrance/Exit

Be sure at least one entry is without steps.

Secure handrails on both sides of all entrance steps.

Support walker/wheelchair access with doorways that are 36 inches wide with offset door hinges.

Avoid tiles or natural materials like marble that are slippery, especially when wet.

Use door handles instead of knobs.

Reduce noise with wood and cork flooring.

Ensure patio doors and screens easily lock.

Be sure doorway thresholds are designed to be nontrip.

Keep exterior pathways free of holes, loose bricks, uneven pavement, leaves or other fall hazards.

## Lighting

Increase incandescent general and specific-task lighting.

Use touch-control lamps and devices that automatically turn lights on and off at set times.

Add additional lighting to staircases and in hallways, either by plugging automatic light-sensor night lights into wall outlets or installing overhead fixtures or wall sconces.

Replace traditional toggle light switches with easier-to-use rocker panel switches.

Place automatic light-sensor night lights in the kitchen, bath and other rooms.

Install light switches that glow in the dark.

Add lighting to closets.

LED lights provide excellent illumination without overtaxing the wiring circuits and are easily dimmable.

Use full-spectrum bulbs that simulate daylight.

Use halogen bulbs to reduce glare.

## Flooring

Plan for contrast colors between floors and walls.

Use textured flooring materials to increase traction; carpeting should be low-pile or low-nap for easier walking or rolling over.

Use only nonskid, matte-finish flooring.

Reduce noise with wood and cork flooring.

Ensure low-pile carpeting is recessed and set level with the surrounding hard flooring.

Avoid tiles or natural materials like marble that are slippery, especially when wet.

## Kitchen

Replace kitchen cabinets with easier-access drawers and pullout shelves.

Ensure a seated workspace in the kitchen (use a table, install a pullout work surface, or remove lower cabinet doors and shelves).

Make appliances easier to reach; consider a raised dishwasher, a wall oven, refrigerator drawers, and washer and dryer pedestals.

Use a step stool with nonslip surfaces and a firm-grip handle.

## Stairs and Steps

Choose tightly woven, low-pile carpet with thin padding for steps; be sure patterned carpet is not too busy to affect vision.

Ensure exterior stair treads are in good condition and that there are no weak or missing steps, loose bricks, raised nailheads, open backs, etc.

Be sure that safe and secure handrails are on both sides of the stairs, placed at a user-appropriate height, placed at a user-appropriate height and properly secured to the walls.

Ensure that stairway lights can be turned on and off at both the top and bottom of the stairs.

See that carpeted steps have a nonslip surface, such as textured adhesive strips.

Use nonslip, adhesive strips on stairs and clear them of clutter.

# Age-in-Place Resources

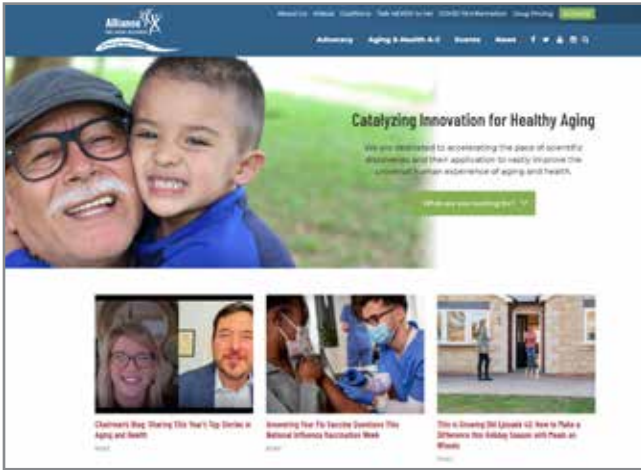
Several resources are available for people interested in learning more about aging in place. As you and your loved ones grow older, it can be helpful to take the guesswork out of planning for a safe home environment.



American Society on Aging  
[www.asaging.org](http://www.asaging.org)



National Alliance for Caregiving  
[www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org)



Alliance for Aging Research  
[www.agingresearch.org](http://www.agingresearch.org)



National Aging in Place Council  
[www.naipc.org](http://www.naipc.org)



**Call today for an in-home visit  
or for more information.**

**(877) 697-7537  
rightathome.net**



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