Practical ways to prevent falls at home for older adults

Falls are one of the most common risks for older people living independently. A single slip can lead to a broken bone, a long hospital stay, and a loss of confidence that changes daily life. The good news is that most falls can be prevented with some thoughtful adjustments around the house. This article walks through the key steps to reduce fall risks at home, from simple clutter removal to choosing the right safety tools.

Before diving into the steps, it helps to understand why falls happen. Age-related changes like weaker muscles, slower reflexes, and balance problems can make everyday tasks more hazardous. Vision changes and medication side effects also play a part. The goal is not to turn a home into a sterile, hospital-like space but to make it safer while keeping it comfortable and familiar.

Step 1: Clear the floors of trip hazards

Tripping is the most common cause of falls at home. Start by looking at every room from a low angle - the same height a walking stick or a shuffling foot would encounter. Loose rugs, electrical cords, and piles of shoes or books are easy to miss but dangerous. Secure rugs with double-sided tape or a non-slip pad underneath. Tuck cords along baseboards or use cord covers. Keep walkways completely clear, especially in high-traffic areas like the hallway between the bedroom and bathroom.

Pay special attention to thresholds between rooms. A raised door frame or a transition strip between carpet and tile can catch a toe. If these cannot be smoothed out, mark them with contrasting tape so they are visible. Also check that floorboards or tiles are even; loose tiles or warped floorboards should be repaired promptly.

Step 2: Improve lighting throughout the home

Poor lighting hides hazards and makes depth perception harder. Install bright, glare-free bulbs in all rooms and hallways. Night lights in bathrooms, hallways, and the kitchen are invaluable for middle-of-the-night trips. Consider motion-sensor lights that turn on automatically when someone walks past - no fumbling for switches in the dark.



Make sure light switches are accessible at room entrances and near the bed. Glow-in-the-dark switch plates or touch lamps can also help. For outdoor steps leading to the front or back door, ensure lights are working and the path is evenly lit.

Step 3: Create safe bathrooms and kitchens

Bathrooms and kitchens have wet surfaces, hard edges, and sudden movements - a recipe for falls. Install grab bars near the toilet and inside the shower or bathtub. A grab bar should be securely anchored to wall studs, not just the tile. Use a non-slip mat or adhesive strips inside the shower and on the bathroom floor outside.

In the kitchen, store everyday items at waist height so there is no need to stretch or crouch. A sturdy step stool with a handrail can help if lower shelves are needed. Keep the floor dry and wipe up spills immediately. Use a non-slip rug near the sink if standing there for long periods.

Consider a raised toilet seat or a shower chair if standing for long periods is tiring. These simple bathroom safety aids reduce the amount of balancing required and make daily tasks more comfortable.

Step 4: Address balance and mobility challenges

Balance problems are often a hidden cause of falls. A mobility aid like a walking stick or a rollator walker can provide extra stability, but only if it is the right height and the person has been shown how to use it properly. Encourage a walking aid assessment with a physiotherapist or occupational therapist if you are unsure.

Strengthening leg muscles and practising balance exercises can also help. Simple seated leg lifts, heel raises, and standing on one foot while holding a chair are safe ways to improve stability. Even ten minutes of daily movement can make a difference over time.



If balance is very poor, consider a fall detection alarm. These wearable devices automatically sense a fall and send an emergency alert to a monitoring centre or a family member. The benefit is that help can arrive quickly even if the person cannot press a button. A service like familyr.co.nz offers a wearable medical alarm with GPS tracking and two-way calling, so the user stays connected wherever they go. This kind of tool is not a replacement for fall prevention but a safety net if a fall still happens.

Step 5: Rearrange furniture for clear pathways

Furniture that blocks walking routes or forces tight turns is a hazard. Arrange sofas, chairs, and tables so there is a straight, wide path from one room to another. Remove low coffee tables or

footstools that stick into walkways. Anchor tall bookcases and dressers to the wall to prevent tipping.

Check that chairs and beds are at a comfortable height to get in and out of. A seat that is too low forces the legs to work harder and can cause a stumble. Raise chairs with firm cushions or bed risers if needed.

Step 6: Manage medications and health conditions

Some medications cause dizziness or drowsiness, which raises fall risk. Review prescriptions with a doctor or pharmacist to identify any that affect balance. Taking medications at the right time and with food can sometimes reduce side effects. Stay hydrated, as dehydration can also cause lightheadedness.

Regular vision and hearing checks are important because sensory decline makes it harder to detect hazards. Keep reading glasses handy and clean them often. If hearing aids are used, make sure they are working properly so that verbal warnings or sounds from the environment are not missed.

Step 7: Prepare for the unexpected with an emergency plan

Even with all the precautions, no home is completely risk-free. Having a plan in place for what happens after a fall can reduce the severity of the outcome. Keep a phone or a wearable emergency alert device within reach at all times. A fall detection alarm that works automatically is ideal because it does not rely on the person being conscious or able to move.



For those who prefer a simpler setup, keep a landline phone on a low table or use a mobile phone with a quick-dial emergency contact. Make sure neighbours or nearby family members have a spare key and know how to check in. Practise what to do: call for help, stay warm, and stay still until help arrives. The faster the response time, the better the recovery.

If you are looking into a wearable alarm, consider one that includes fall detection and a family monitoring feature. familyr.co.nz provides GPS location tracking so that family members can see where the user is, which adds peace of mind for everyone. The absence of monthly fees also makes it a practical choice for long-term use.

Final thoughts

Reducing fall risks at home does not require a complete overhaul. Small, consistent changes - clearing clutter, improving lighting, adding grab bars, and staying active - can dramatically lower the chance of a serious fall. Pair these preventive steps with a reliable emergency alert system, and you create a home where an older person can live safely and confidently for years to come.