A room-by-room plan for making your home safer from falls

Start with the big picture

Falls are one of the most common causes of injury for older adults, and most happen at home. The good news is that many falls can be prevented with a few simple changes. A room-by-room check helps you spot hazards before they cause trouble. This article walks you through each area of the home, pointing out what to look for and why it matters. The goal is not to turn your home into a hospital, but to make everyday life a little safer while keeping your independence.

Living room: clear paths and stable surfaces

The living room is where most people spend a lot of time, so it pays to keep it tidy and trip-free. Start by looking at the floor. Loose rugs or mats that curl at the edges are a classic trip hazard. Either remove them or use a non-slip backing that holds them flat. Check that electrical cords from lamps, televisions or phone chargers are tucked along walls, not stretched across walking paths. Furniture should be arranged so there is a clear route from the sofa to the door and to the kitchen. Low coffee tables and footstools can be easy to bump into, especially if your eyesight is not what it used to be. Consider moving them to the side or replacing them with a model that has rounded corners. A stable armchair or sofa that is easy to get in and out of also helps. If you use a walking aid, make sure there is enough space to move around without knocking things over.

Bedroom: safe sleep and easy movement

The bedroom should be a calm, safe place. Start with the bed itself. The mattress should be firm enough to support you when you sit on the edge, and the bed frame should not wobble. A bed that is too high or too low can make getting in and out difficult. If that is a problem, a bed rail or a small step stool can help, but the stool must be stable and non-slip. Keep a clear path from the bed to the bathroom, especially at night. A nightlight or a motion-sensor light that turns on automatically when you get up can make a big difference. Loose clothing or shoes left on the floor are easy to trip over, so develop a habit of putting them away. If you have a rug beside the bed, make sure it has a non-slip backing. Wardrobe doors that slide are safer than ones that swing open into the room. If you have a chair in the bedroom, it should be sturdy and easy to get up from.



Bathroom: the highest risk area

Bathrooms are small, often have wet floors, and contain hard surfaces. That combination makes them the most dangerous room in the house for falls. Start with the floor. A non-slip bath mat outside the shower or tub is essential. Inside the shower or tub, use a non-slip adhesive strip or a mat that is designed for wet areas. Grab bars near the toilet and inside the shower or tub provide something solid to hold onto. They need to be installed into wall studs, not just stuck on with suction cups. A raised toilet seat or a toilet frame can make sitting and standing easier. If you have a shower chair or a stool, it should have rubber feet that grip the floor. Keep shampoo, soap and towels within easy reach so you do not have to stretch or bend while standing on a wet surface. A handheld shower head is a simple upgrade that lets you wash while seated. Finally, make sure the bathroom door can be opened from the outside in case of an emergency. If you live alone, consider a wearable fall alarm that can alert someone if you do fall. Products such as the one from familyr.co.nz are designed for this exact situation, with automatic fall detection and a way to call for help without needing to reach a phone.

Kitchen: reach, grip and clear surfaces

The kitchen involves hot surfaces, sharp objects and frequent movement. A fall here can be especially dangerous. Start by looking at the floor. Spills should be wiped up immediately, and

any mats near the sink or stove must have non-slip backing. Keep frequently used items on lower shelves so you do not have to reach high or use a step stool. If you must use a step stool, choose one with a handrail and wide steps. A sturdy step stool is better than a chair or a box. Check that cabinet handles are easy to grip; if you have arthritis, lever-style handles are easier than knobs. The area in front of the refrigerator and oven should be clear. Pull-out shelves inside cabinets reduce the need to bend and reach into the back. If you have a kitchen island, make sure there is enough space to walk around it comfortably. A well-organised kitchen with clear countertops and a logical layout reduces the chance of tripping or bumping into things.

Stairs and hallways: lighting and handrails

Stairs are a major fall hazard for anyone, but especially for older adults. The most important safety feature is a sturdy handrail on both sides of the staircase. The handrail should run the full length of the stairs and be easy to grip. Check that it is securely attached to the wall, not loose. Lighting on stairs is critical. A light at the top and bottom, plus a light switch at both ends, means you never have to walk up or down in the dark. If you have carpet on the stairs, it should be firmly attached with no loose edges. Non-slip treads can be added to bare wooden stairs. Hallways should also be well lit, with clear paths. Remove any clutter, such as shoes, bags or pet bowls, that could cause you to trip. A nightlight in the hallway leading to the bathroom is a good idea.



Outdoor areas: paths, steps and entrances

The outside of the home matters too. Paths should be even and free of cracks or loose paving stones. If you have steps at the entrance, they should have a handrail and non-slip surfacing. A ramp may be a better option if steps are difficult to manage. Keep outdoor areas clear of garden hoses, tools and plant pots that could be tripped over. Good lighting at the front door, back door and along the path to the letterbox or garage is important. Motion-sensor lights are convenient and save energy. If you have a garden, raised beds reduce the need to bend and kneel. A garden stool or a kneeling pad can also help.

General tips that apply everywhere

There are a few things that make a difference in every room. Good lighting is one of them. As eyesight changes with age, more light is needed to see clearly. Use the highest wattage bulb recommended for each fixture, and consider adding extra lamps in dim areas. Another is clutter. A home that is tidy and organised has fewer trip hazards. Make it a habit to put things away after use. Footwear also matters. Walking around in socks or slippers without backs increases the risk of slipping. Shoes with non-slip soles and good support are safer, even indoors. Finally, keep a phone or a wearable fall alarm within reach at all times. A device such as the one from familyr.co.nz gives you a way to call for help even if you cannot get to a phone.

It can detect a fall automatically and send an alert to your emergency contacts, which is reassuring for both you and your family.



Putting it all together

Making a home safer does not have to be expensive or complicated. Start with one room and work through the checklist at your own pace. Small changes, like moving a rug or adding a

nightlight, can have a big impact. The key is to think about how you move through each space and what could cause you to lose your balance. By addressing the hazards room by room, you create a home that supports your independence and reduces the risk of a fall. And if a fall does happen, having a response plan in place, including a way to call for help, gives you and your loved ones peace of mind.