THRIVING SENIOR

Helping seniors live better, one tip at a time

Bathroom Safety Checklist

Every upgrade worth making, ranked by impact

☐ Install stud-anchored metal grab bars at the tub entry

Use a stud finder to locate the wall studs at the entry point of your tub or shower. Mount a grab bar rated for at least 250 pounds using 3-inch lag screws driven directly into studs. If studs are not in the right position, have a contractor install blocking between studs before mounting. Test by applying your full body weight before relying on the bar.

☐ Add a grab bar along the back shower wall

Position a horizontal bar along the back wall of the shower at hip height, typically 33 to 36 inches from the floor. This bar provides stability while washing and is essential for anyone who showers seated. Again, anchor into studs or pre-installed blocking only. A 24-inch or 36-inch bar works for most shower configurations.

☐ Mount a grab bar beside the toilet

Install a bar on the wall beside the toilet at a height that allows the user to push up from a seated position, usually 33 to 36 inches from the floor. The bar should run horizontally or at a slight angle. For toilets positioned away from a wall, a floor-mounted support rail can be used instead and adjusted to the correct height.

☐ Place a non-slip mat inside the tub or shower floor

Select a mat with dense suction cups on the underside that grip the tub or shower surface when pressed down. Lay it flat so it covers the center of the floor where you stand. Lift and clean beneath the mat weekly, as mold can develop underneath and cause the suction cups to lose grip. Replace the mat as soon as the suction cups begin to fail.

☐ Apply textured adhesive strips to a tiled shower floor

For walk-in showers with tiled floors, adhesive non-slip strips add friction without covering the full floor. Clean and dry the tile surface completely before applying strips according to the package directions. Press firmly along the entire length of each strip to ensure full adhesion. Replace strips annually or when the textured surface begins to wear smooth.

☐ Use a non-slip bathmat outside the tub or shower

Place a bathmat with a rubberized, non-slip backing on the floor directly beside the tub or shower exit. This mat catches dripping water and prevents slipping as you step out. Check that the edges lie completely flat and that the backing still grips the floor. Any mat that bunches, slides, or curls at the edges should be replaced immediately.

☐ Install a raised toilet seat with armrests

Choose a raised seat that adds 2 to 4 inches of height and includes locking side armrests. Secure it to the toilet bowl using the provided clamps so it does not shift during use. Test stability before sitting. Remove the seat for thorough cleaning at least once a week, as hardware crevices collect bacteria if neglected.

☐ Replace the fixed showerhead with a handheld model

Unscrew the existing showerhead from the wall pipe and attach a handheld unit with a 60-inch or longer flexible hose. Use plumber's tape on the threads to prevent leaks. Mount the adjustable bracket at a height that works for both standing and seated use. Look for a model with a pause or flow-control button so water can be stopped without turning off the valve.

☐ Add a sturdy shower bench or seat

Choose a teak or heavy-duty plastic bench rated for at least 300 pounds with rubberized non-slip feet. Position it beneath the handheld showerhead so the user can bathe fully from a seated position. Fold-down wall-mounted seats are an option if floor space is limited, but they must be anchored into studs and tested before use.

☐ Replace round faucet knobs with lever-style handles

Contact a licensed plumber or a handy family member to swap out any round knob-style faucet handles for lever handles. Lever handles can be operated with a closed fist, the back of a hand, or even an elbow, which is essential for anyone with arthritis or reduced grip strength. This upgrade applies to both sink faucets and shower or tub controls.

☐ Upgrade lighting to at least 75-watt equivalent bulbs

Replace any dim bulbs in the bathroom overhead fixture with LED bulbs equivalent to 75 watts or more. Add a vanity light or wall sconce if the single overhead fixture leaves shadows near the toilet or shower. Bright, even lighting reduces the visual misperceptions that contribute to missteps, particularly for anyone with vision changes related to cataracts or glaucoma.

☐ Install motion-activated night lights along the hallway path

Plug motion-activated night lights into outlets in the hallway between the bedroom and bathroom, as well as one inside the bathroom near the toilet. Test each light by walking past it in a darkened room to confirm the sensor activates at the right distance. Replace batteries or bulbs immediately when they fail, and check function monthly.

☐ Set the water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or lower

Locate your water heater's temperature dial, typically on the side of the unit, and confirm it is set no higher than 120 degrees. Scalding water causes serious burns in seniors, partly because age-related neuropathy reduces how quickly temperature changes are perceived. If the dial is not clearly marked, call a licensed plumber or the water heater manufacturer for guidance.

☐ Remove or secure any rugs between the bedroom and bathroom

Walk the path from your bed to the bathroom and identify any loose rugs, bunched carpet edges, or thresholds that could catch a foot. Remove rugs that cannot be secured with double-sided carpet tape or a non-slip rug pad. Pay particular attention to thresholds between rooms, as the slight elevation change is a common tripping hazard, especially in low light.

What to Do Next

Once you have completed the audit, prioritize any unchecked items by risk level, starting with grab bar installation and non-slip flooring before moving to lighting and fixture upgrades. If you need professional installation help or financial assistance covering the cost, call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit eldercare.acl.gov to find local services. Revisit this checklist every six months, or any time a household member experiences a significant change in mobility, balance, or vision.

Print this page. Work through one box at a time. Every box you check is one more layer of protection.