THRIVING SENIOR

Helping seniors live better, one tip at a time

Home Fall-Prevention Checklist

Room-by-room edits that actually reduce fall risk

- [ ] **BATHROOM: Install grab bars at the toilet and shower**

  Mount one bar beside the toilet at a height of 33 to 36 inches from the floor, angled to help with sitting and rising. Install a second bar inside the shower or tub at a 45-degree diagonal or horizontal position between 33 and 36 inches. Use a stud finder to anchor into studs; if studs are not accessible, use toggle bolts rated for at least 250 pounds of shear force. Bars should have a 1.25-inch diameter and a non-slip texture.

- [ ] **BATHROOM: Replace the tub with a walk-in shower or add a tub transfer bench**

  Stepping over a tub wall is one of the highest-risk movements for older adults. If a full remodel is not feasible, a sturdy tub transfer bench allows you to sit on the bench outside the tub and slide over the edge. Look for a bench with adjustable legs, a backrest, and a weight capacity appropriate for the user. Pair it with a handheld showerhead on a sliding bar so you can bathe seated.

- [ ] **BATHROOM: Place a non-slip mat inside and outside the shower or tub**

  Inside the tub or shower, apply adhesive non-slip treads or a suction-backed mat that covers the full floor area. Outside the tub or shower, place a bath mat with a rubber non-slip backing. Check the backing monthly by lifting a corner — if it no longer grips the floor firmly, replace the mat. Avoid mats with fringe edges or thick fabric piles that can catch a foot.

- [ ] **STAIRS: Secure handrails on both sides from top to bottom**

  Every staircase should have a graspable handrail on at least one side — both sides is strongly preferred. Grasp each rail and pull outward firmly; if it shifts, a licensed handyman should re-anchor it into the wall studs. Rails should extend the full length of the staircase, including the top and bottom landings, and should have a diameter of 1.25 to 2 inches for a secure grip. If your rail is a flat board, a cylindrical rail can be mounted on top of it.

- [ ] **STAIRS: Add high-contrast edge tape to every step**

  Apply a strip of brightly colored or reflective non-slip stair-edge tape to the front edge, called the nosing, of each step. This serves two purposes: it makes the edge visible in low light, and it adds grip to a surface that is often the slipperiest part of the stair. For carpeted stairs, use adhesive carpet tape to secure any loose edges before adding the contrast strip. Check the tape every three months and replace any sections that are lifting.

☐ STAIRS: Install a motion-activated light at top and bottom of staircase

Many stair falls happen because a person reaches for a light switch at the top or bottom of the stairs before the light is on. A plug-in or hardwired motion-activated light that turns on automatically eliminates this gap. Place one sensor-activated fixture at the top of the staircase and one at the bottom. If the staircase is long, add a third midway. LED bulbs are preferred for their instant-on capability and long life.

☐ KITCHEN: Rearrange cabinets to keep daily items between waist and shoulder height

Reaching overhead and bending to low cabinets are both high-risk movements in the kitchen. Do a cabinet audit and move the items you use every day — dishes, glasses, pots, dry goods — to shelves between your waist and shoulder. Store rarely used items higher or lower. If you must reach a high shelf occasionally, use a step stool with a handrail and non-slip rubber feet, never a chair. Remove the step stool from the floor when not in use to eliminate a tripping hazard.

☐ KITCHEN: Remove or secure all loose rugs and runners

Loose rugs in front of the sink or stove are among the most common kitchen fall triggers. Remove any rug that does not have a firmly gripping non-slip backing, or use double-sided carpet tape to secure all four edges to the floor. Press down and walk across the mat to confirm it does not slide or buckle. If you like a cushioned surface while standing at the sink, an anti-fatigue mat with beveled edges and a heavy non-slip base is a safer alternative.

☐ BEDROOM: Place a lamp or motion-activated light within arm's reach of the bed

Before your feet touch the floor in the middle of the night, you should be able to illuminate the room. Place a touch lamp, a lamp with a remote control, or a motion-activated plug-in light on the nightstand. Install motion-activated LED lights along the floor of the path from your bed to the bathroom — these are available as plug-in strip lights that activate automatically when you get up. Test them from a lying position to confirm they illuminate before you stand.

☐ BEDROOM: Adjust the bed height so both feet rest flat on the floor when seated

A bed that is too low requires a difficult rocking motion to stand up and increases the risk of losing balance. A bed that is too high puts your feet dangling and makes getting in risky. The correct height places your hips at roughly 90 degrees when you are seated on the edge, with both feet flat on the floor. Bed risers can raise a low frame; a new lower box spring or platform frame can reduce height. Confirm the bed frame is stable and does not slide on hard flooring — furniture grippers under each leg provide a low-cost fix.

☐ OUTDOOR: Repair cracked or uneven walkways and driveway surfaces

Inspect all paved surfaces from the public sidewalk to your front door, including driveway aprons, porch steps, and garden paths. Any crack wider than half an inch or any surface that has heaved more than a quarter inch above an adjacent slab is a tripping hazard. Small concrete repairs can be made with hydraulic or vinyl concrete patching compound available at hardware stores. Larger repairs require a licensed concrete contractor. After repair, apply a non-slip concrete sealer to the surface for additional grip.

☐ OUTDOOR: Install lighting at all entrances and along walking paths

Ensure that every exterior door has a functioning overhead light with a bulb bright enough to illuminate the step and doorknob area. Add solar-powered or low-voltage LED path lights along the driveway or garden walkway. Motion-activated floodlights on the garage and back entrance improve safety during evening arrivals. Check all outdoor bulbs monthly and replace immediately when burned out. Keep a spare bulb in an accessible location so replacement never requires a ladder at night.

☐ WHOLE HOME: Remove all tripping hazards from walking paths

Walk every major path in your home — bedroom to bathroom, kitchen to dining area, front door to living room — and remove anything that crosses the path at floor level. This includes electrical cords, telephone cords, decorative baskets, magazine piles, pet toys, and shoes left near doors. Route all cords along baseboards and secure with cable clips. Install a hook or shelf near the entrance door for shoes so they are stored immediately rather than left on the floor.

☐ WHOLE HOME: Wear proper footwear at all times, including indoors

Walking in socks or backless slippers is one of the most underestimated fall risks in the home. Choose footwear with a non-slip rubber sole, a closed heel, and a low, wide heel profile. Slippers should have a sole thick enough to feel the floor clearly without being so thick they alter your gait. Avoid shoes or slippers with slick leather or fabric soles. If you are unsure which footwear is safest given your gait or any foot conditions, ask your podiatrist or physical therapist for a specific recommendation.

What to Do Next

Once every item on this list is checked off, schedule a reassessment in six months — seasonal changes, new furniture, and gradual home wear can introduce new hazards. If you or a family member has already experienced a fall or near-fall, ask your primary care physician for a referral to a physical therapist for a formal balance and gait evaluation, which Medicare Part B covers. You can also contact your local Area Agency on Aging through eldercare.acl.gov to ask about free or subsidized home safety assessments conducted by trained professionals.

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