

Safe at Home for the Long Haul

By Kent Elliott

Many active seniors choose to stay in their own homes well past retirement. Reasons for this vary, but may include wanting the comfort of familiar surroundings or a desire to maintain a sense of independence. Today, as seniors live longer and have access to medical care to keep them healthier, more and more older adults are choosing to age in place. And there are many preparations that seniors can take to ensure that they will have the ability to stay safe at home.

Home modifications that matter

One of the biggest risks that seniors face when living alone is falling. According to Uplifting Mobility, an older American is admitted to the emergency room [every 11 seconds](#) because of injuries sustained from a falling accident. Many of these could've been prevented with a few simple and inexpensive modifications to their home.

The bathroom is one of the most dangerous areas for seniors, and where many wind up losing their balance. Slippery floors and having to climb over a tall bathtub wall are just two factors that can lead to shower-time accidents. For about \$30, seniors can purchase easy-to-install grab bars [for the bathroom](#). These are exactly what they sound like: bars that the senior can hold onto to improve their balance and stability.

Stairs are another significant hazard, and especially so for seniors with mobility or vision issues. While most senior living experts recommend a single-story home, there are devices that can make stairs less of a danger. Motion sensor lights and a motorized stair lift can reduce the chances of having a serious accident on the stairs. Unfortunately, Medicare does not cover stair lifts, but it does cover many other pieces of equipment that can enhance senior safety.

Seniors may also reduce the risk of falling by eliminating obstacles throughout the home. Things like low-lying furniture, cords, and [unsecured area rugs](#) should be addressed. Added lighting throughout the house will also help.

Medicare coverage

Original Medicare does not provide coverage for grab bars, and it also does not cover [stair lifts](#). However, it does pay for many items that enhance mobility under the durable medical equipment benefits. A few examples of durable medical equipment include crutches, canes, walkers, and lift chairs. Many Medicare Advantage plans offer additional coverage, including for grab bars. Research and compare the Advantage plans available to you to [learn more](#).

Lifestyle matters

The National Council for Aging Care explains that exercise is perhaps the [most significant contributor](#) to a long life. Not only does exercise strengthen the body, staying active at all ages

can reduce chronic pain, slow or prevent the effects of dementia, and make the body better able to balance and flex. All of these benefits work together to make seniors safer both at home and while on the go. Besides exercise, other lifestyle factors that play a part in senior independence are sleep quality, nutrition, and social activities.

Seniors need just as much sleep as other adults, and this is typically between seven and nine hours every night. However, many conditions, including respiratory and gastrointestinal problems, cancer, Parkinson's disease, and incontinence, can [make it difficult](#) to obtain an adequate amount of restorative rest. Seniors who don't sleep may be less able to react quickly when losing their balance. Similarly, eating a balanced diet gives the brain the fuel it needs to stay active and alert. Socialization also [helps maintain](#) brain activity.

Aging in place is an attainable goal, and especially so for seniors who are willing to make changes to their home and lifestyle to make it happen. Coupled with advances in modern medicine, many individuals can now remain independent into their 80s and beyond.



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