Making Home Safer for Independent Living: A Room-by-Room Check

For many older adults, staying in their own home means keeping both comfort and safety in balance. Small hazards can turn into serious problems, but a methodical check of each living area can catch most trouble before it starts. This article walks through the spaces that matter most, with practical points to look at and a short reason for each. The goal is not to overhaul your home, but to spot simple changes that make daily life safer and give everyone in the family more peace of mind.

The Living Area: Where Most Time Is Spent

The lounge or family room is where people sit, watch television, and often doze off. It is also where trip hazards tend to gather.

- **Check rugs and mats for curled edges or wrinkles.** A corner that sticks up can catch a shoe or a walking stick. A non-slip underlay or double-sided tape fixes this in minutes.
- **Look at the path between the sofa and the bathroom or kitchen.** Furniture that sticks out into the walkway forces a detour. Re-arrange chairs and tables so the route is straight and clear.
- **Test the lighting at night.** A dim room makes it hard to see obstacles. Plug-in night lights along the path help, especially near steps or changes in floor level.
- **Check that cords from lamps, chargers and the television are tucked away.** A loose cord running across the floor is a classic trip hazard. Use cord clips or cable covers along the baseboard.

Each of these checks takes a minute or two. Together they reduce the chance of a fall during the most relaxed parts of the day.

The Kitchen: Heat, Water and Reach

Kitchen accidents often involve reaching for something high, spilling hot liquid, or leaving a burner on. A few adjustments lower the risk.

- **Move everyday items to waist-level cupboards.** Keeping plates, cups, and staple foods between hip and shoulder height means no need to climb for them or bend low. If a step stool is still needed, pick one with a handle and a wide, non-slip base.

- **Check that the kettle and toaster are near a power point, not trailing a cord across the bench.** A cord that hangs over the edge can snag clothing and pull the appliance down.
- **Look at the cooker controls.** If the knobs are hard to read or turn, consider knob covers or a simple sticker that marks Off clearly. An induction hob that only heats when a pan is on it is another option, but even a visual check of the old hob after cooking helps.
- **Keep a small fire extinguisher or a fire blanket where it is easy to grab.** It should be near the kitchen exit, not right above the stove where a fire makes it unreachable.

These checks focus on the tasks that happen every day: making a cup of tea, heating a meal, and washing up. A safer kitchen means fewer burns and less strain on joints.



The Bathroom: Slippery Surfaces and Sudden Moves

Bathrooms are wet, shiny and often small. A fall here can be serious because of hard surfaces and sharp edges.

Check the floor for non-slip treatment. A mat with suction cups is a start, but the floor itself may need a non-slip coating or adhesive strips. Even a textured bath mat that covers the whole wet area helps. **Test the grab bars.** If there is no bar near the toilet or inside the shower, a portable one that screws into the wall stud is a good investment. Suction-cup bars can slip. For a quick improvement, a raised toilet seat with armrests gives something to push against when

standing up. **Look at the water temperature.** If the tap water can get hot enough to scald, a thermostatic mixing valve or a simple anti-scald device on the shower head can prevent injury. **Check that the towel rail is not used as a grab bar.** A rail that is only held by a few screws can pull out of the wall when someone leans on it. Install a proper grab bar nearby instead.

A bathroom check takes a bit longer, but it covers the room where falls are most likely to happen and where help may not arrive quickly.

Bedrooms: Getting In and Out of Bed

The bedroom should be a calm space for rest. Yet many falls happen when a person gets up in the night, half-asleep and in the dark.

Check the path from the bed to the bathroom is clear. Shoes, laundry and pet beds can end up on the floor. A clear walkway with a low-level night light reduces the chance of tripping. **Look at the bed height.** If the mattress is too low, getting up requires a deep squat. A bed riser or a thicker mattress topper lifts the sleeping surface so the feet can touch the floor easily. **Test the bedside lamp and phone charger.** A lamp with a touch switch or a motion-sensor light avoids fumbling for a switch in the dark. Keep a cordless phone or mobile phone on the nightstand so a call for help is within reach without getting out of bed.

These small changes make the bedroom a safer space for the most vulnerable moments of the day.

Stairs and Hallways: The Risky Transition Points

Stairs are the most dangerous part of any home. Even a single step between rooms can be a hazard if it is not clearly visible.



Check that every step has a secure handrail on both sides if possible. A rail that is loose or too low is worse than no rail. Tighten it or replace it. **Look at the tread surface.** If the stairs are wooden or tiled, non-slip stair treads or a painted anti-slip coating can stop a foot from sliding. **Test the lighting at the top and bottom of the stairs.** A light switch at both ends is best. If that is not possible, a timer light or a motion-sensor bulb that comes on when someone approaches works well. **Check that nothing is stored on the stairs.** A pile of laundry, a vacuum cleaner, or a stack of books is an invitation to trip. Keep stairs clear at all times.

Hallways that connect rooms should also be clear. A narrow hallway with a single lamp on the floor is a hazard. Wall-mounted lights or a small console table with a lamp in the corner keep the floor free.

Emergency Communication: Staying Connected

Even with a safer home, an unexpected fall or a sudden illness can leave someone unable to reach a phone. That is where a personal alarm or an **independent living alarm** becomes part of the safety plan.

When choosing a device, check that it works wherever the person moves inside the house and in the garden. A system that relies on a landline phone may not work in the garage or the back shed. **Test the range of the wearable button** and whether it uses a cellular network or a dedicated base station. A device with GPS and two-way calling, like the one offered at familyr.co.nz, can help even if the person is away from home. **Check how the alarm is triggered and who is notified.** Some systems call a monitoring centre; others alert a family member directly. Think about which method fits the person's routine and the family's availability. **Test the battery life and charging habit.** A wearable that needs charging every night may be forgotten. A device with a long battery life and a low-battery alert is easier to keep on. **Review the fall detection feature.** Not all alarms detect a fall automatically. If the person cannot press the SOS button after a fall, a device that senses the impact and angle is important.

A good independent living alarm is not a substitute for a safe home, but it adds a layer of confidence. When the home checks are done, a reliable way to call for help completes the picture. For those who want a family-monitored option with no monthly fees, the service at familyr.co.nz is one example of how these features can be combined.

A Care Plan That Grows With the Person

Safety at home is not a one-time task. A person's abilities change over time, and the home should change with them. A simple care plan, shared with family or close friends, can list who to contact in an emergency, where the emergency contacts are stored, and what medical conditions or medications matter. Keep a copy on the fridge and another in a drawer that a visitor can find easily.



Review the plan every six months or after any hospital stay. What worked last year may no longer be enough. A small adjustment, like moving the bed to a room on the ground floor, can keep the home safe for years longer.

Final Practical Checks

Before finishing the walk-through, run through a few general points that apply to every room:

- **Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.** Test them monthly and replace batteries once a year. A detector with a sealed ten-year battery saves the trouble of remembering to change it.
- **Door handles and locks.** Lever-style handles are easier to open than round knobs for someone with arthritis. A lock that needs a key from both sides can be a fire hazard; choose a lock that opens with a simple turn from inside.
- **Outdoor areas.** Check paths for cracks, loose pavers, and overgrown plants that narrow the walkway. A clear, even surface reduces the chance of a fall when hanging washing or gardening.

Each room in the home can be safer with a few minutes of attention. The checklist above covers the main spaces and the key points to look at. Making these checks part of a regular

routine, and pairing them with a reliable way to call for help, lets older adults stay independent longer while giving their family the reassurance that comes from a well-prepared home.