A home safety checklist for reducing falls in later life

Why a fall-proof home matters

A fall can change everything in a matter of seconds. For older adults, the consequences often go beyond a bruise or a fracture. A serious fall can lead to a loss of independence, a move away from home, and a long road to recovery. The good news is that most falls are preventable. By looking at your home with fresh eyes, you can spot risks you have walked past for years and fix them before they cause trouble.

This checklist walks you through the main areas of a house, pointing out what to check and why it matters. The aim is not to turn your home into a hospital ward but to make it safer while keeping it comfortable and familiar. Think of it as a gentle audit, done at your own pace.

Flooring and walkways

The surfaces you walk on every day are the most common place for a fall to start. Loose rugs, uneven flooring, and clutter on the floor are easy to overlook until they trip you up.

Check for loose rugs and mats

Rugs that slide or curl at the edges are a classic hazard. A person can catch a toe on a lifted corner or slip when the rug shifts underfoot. If you want to keep a rug, use a non-slip pad underneath or double-sided carpet tape to hold it flat. Better still, remove small rugs from high-traffic areas altogether.

Look for uneven surfaces

Transition strips between rooms, raised thresholds, and cracked tiles can catch a foot or a walking stick. If you notice a lip between two floor coverings, a small ramp or a smoother transition strip can make a big difference. For cracked or lifted flooring, arrange a repair as soon as possible.

Clear the path

Shoes, bags, cables, and low furniture can turn a hallway into an obstacle course. Keep walkways clear, especially in corridors and near the bedroom and bathroom. Tuck cables against walls or use cable covers. Make sure there is enough space for a walker or wheelchair if you use one.

Lighting and visibility

Good lighting helps you see obstacles before you meet them. As vision changes with age, shadows and glare become more dangerous.



Check brightness in key spots

The bathroom, stairs, and the path from the bed to the toilet need the most light. A nightlight in the hallway and one in the bathroom can prevent a disoriented stumble in the dark. Motion-sensor lights that come on automatically are even better.

Reduce glare and shadows

Bright, uncovered bulbs can create harsh shadows that hide obstacles. Use lampshades or frosted bulbs to soften the light. Avoid glossy floors that reflect light into your eyes.

Make switches easy to reach

Light switches should be reachable from the bed and from the entrance to each room. Glow-in-the-dark switch plates or illuminated switches help you find them in the dark.

Stairs and steps

Stairs are one of the most dangerous places in any home, especially if you have mobility issues or balance problems.

Check handrails

Handrails should be on both sides of the stairway, continuous from top to bottom. They need to be sturdy enough to support your full weight. If a handrail wobbles or is only on one side, consider having a second one fitted.

Improve step visibility

Paint or tape a contrasting colour on the edge of each step so you can see where one step ends and the next begins. Non-slip treads on bare wood or tile steps reduce the chance of slipping.

Remove loose items

Never leave shoes, laundry, or anything else on the stairs. A single object can cause a trip that sends you tumbling.

Bathroom safety

The bathroom combines wet surfaces, hard fixtures, and often limited space. It is a high-risk zone for falls.

Install grab bars

Grab bars near the toilet and inside or next to the shower and bath provide something solid to hold onto. Towel rails and soap dishes are not designed to take your weight and can pull out of the wall. A professional installation of grab bars into the wall studs is a worthwhile investment.

Use a non-slip mat or strips

A non-slip bath mat inside the shower or tub, and a non-slip rug outside, reduce the chance of slipping on wet surfaces. Some people find adhesive non-slip strips easier to clean and more reliable than a mat.



Consider a shower chair and hand-held shower

Standing in the shower for a long time can be tiring. A shower chair lets you sit while washing, and a hand-held shower head makes it easier to rinse without twisting or reaching. This combination greatly reduces the risk of falling.

Bedroom and sleeping area

Getting up in the night to use the bathroom is a common time for falls. A few small changes can make the bedroom safer.

Lower the bed height

A bed that is too high can make it hard to stand up, while a bed that is too low can be hard to get out of. Your feet should touch the floor comfortably when you sit on the edge. If the bed is too high, a lower bed frame or a platform base can help.

Clear the floor around the bed

Remove any clutter, shoes, or cords near the bed. Keep a torch or a mobile phone on the bedside table so you do not have to fumble for a light switch in the dark.

Use a bedside commode or urinal

For people who wake often to use the toilet, a bedside commode can eliminate the need to walk to the bathroom in the dark. This is a simple solution that can prevent many falls.

Kitchen and dining area

The kitchen has its own set of hazards: hot surfaces, spills, and items stored out of reach.

Rearrange storage

Keep everyday items like plates, cups, and pans at waist height so you do not have to reach up high or bend down low. Heavy items should be stored on lower shelves to avoid a strain or a fall when lifting them.

Wipe up spills immediately

A wet floor in the kitchen is a slip waiting to happen. Keep a cloth or mop handy and clean up any spills as soon as they happen. Non-slip mats in front of the sink and stove can also help.

Check step stools

If you must use a step stool to reach high shelves, choose one with a handrail and wide, non-slip steps. A standard chair or a box is not stable enough and can tip over easily.

General home safety and emergency response

Even with the best prevention, falls can still happen. Having a way to call for help quickly can reduce the time you spend on the floor, which is important for your recovery and peace of mind.



Keep a phone within reach

Have a phone in every room, or at least carry a mobile phone with you. A phone that is on the other side of the house is no use if you cannot get to it.

Consider a personal alert device

A personal alert system, often called a senior SOS button, lets you call for help with the push of a button. Some devices also detect a fall automatically and send an alert even if you cannot press the button. This kind of system can be worn as a pendant, a wristband, or clipped to a belt. The key is to choose one that works in your home and, if you go out, outside as well. A device from a provider like familyr.co.nz offers fall detection, two-way calling, and GPS location, so help can be sent to exactly where you are. This can be a comfort not only for the person wearing it but for family members who live far away.

Set up an emergency contact list

Make a list of people to call in an emergency and keep it near the phone or programmed into your mobile. Share this list with a neighbour or a nearby friend so they know who to contact if they cannot reach you.

Regular review

A home safety check is not a one-time task. As you age, your needs and abilities change, and your home should adapt with you. Make it a habit to walk through each room every few months, looking for new hazards. A small adjustment today can prevent a serious fall tomorrow.

Taking these steps does not mean giving up your independence. It means protecting it. A safer home is a home where you can keep living the way you want, with fewer worries and more confidence. If you want to learn more about how technology like a senior SOS button can support independent living, a service like familyr.co.nz provides a good starting point for understanding what is available.