

## Home Safety

Most people are familiar with the concept of childproofing a home when a new baby arrives. But what about bringing your aging parents in to live with you when independent living is no longer an option? There are several steps you can take to “elder-proof” your home and ensure a safe and comfortable environment for your parents in their later years. And when a parent, who is facing an advanced illness is living with you, home safety takes on a new level of importance.

### Preventing Falls

A primary safety concern with the elderly is the prevention of falls. Falls are the leading cause of injury or even death among the elderly. Fortunately, there are many ways to safeguard your home against potential falls.

- Remove all tripping hazards such as books, shoes, toys, electrical cords, etc., from the floors.
- Remove all throw rugs.
- Remove furniture from high-traffic areas if possible, and pad any sharp edges with plastic bumpers.
- Remove the casters to stabilize movable furniture items.
- Remove unstable tables and stools to avoid tipping, and put fragile or breakable items away.
- If your parent uses a cane, you may also wish to attach a loose wrist loop to the handle. This will prevent your parent from having to bend down to retrieve a dropped cane.
- Polish linoleum and wood flooring using only non-slip floor wax.
- Textured strips can also be placed on linoleum to provide better grip, and all spills should be cleaned up immediately.
- Add grab bars or handrails along staircases and hallways to help prevent falls, and grab bars next to closet doors to support your parent while dressing.
- Place colored, non-slip strips along areas where floor levels change, such as stairs and doorway thresholds, to help clearly identify where your parent will need to step up or down and prevent stumbles.
- Make sure the bed and chairs are easy to get in and out of, and that chairs have solid and supportive arms and backs.

### Lighting the Way

Lighting is another important safety consideration in the prevention of falls. It is easier for elderly eyes to adjust if there are consistent lighting levels throughout the house, using low-glare bulbs and shades. Night lights are helpful to guide your parent along stairways as well as from the bedroom to the bathroom and kitchen. Light switches placed at both the top and bottom of stairs will ensure good visibility. Install a light

switch that can be reached from the bed to prevent your parent from fumbling in the dark if they awaken in the middle of the night. Illuminated light switches are much easier to locate in the dark, or you may choose a clap-on, clap-off lighting system. Flashlights should be easily accessible in all rooms of the home, especially the bedroom.

## Bathroom Safety

- The bathroom can be a particularly treacherous room for the elderly, but is easily adapted for safety. Consider taking these safety measures:
- Adding an elevated toilet seat with handgrips on both sides, and toilet tissue within easy reach can ease the strain on an aging parent's back and legs, thus reducing the risk of falling.
- Equip the tub with a bath chair, or grab bars or a handrail placed at both sitting and standing levels.
- Use secure non-slip mats in the tub or shower, along with a wall-mounted liquid soap dispenser to keep your parent from having to bend down to retrieve a dropped bar of soap.
- Consider changing to hand-held shower devices. They are easier to use when mobility is limited.
- If your parent does happen to slip in the tub, a shower curtain securely mounted into the wall will offer more support than a pressure-hung curtain that will pull away easily.

## Temperature Concerns

As we age, our sensitivity to hot and cold temperatures may wane. Anti-scald devices can be installed which will automatically shut off the water if it gets too hot. Faucets with a single control for hot and cold water may be easier to adjust for temperature. You should also ensure your parent has sufficient robes, blankets and warm clothing available to maintain their body temperature without the use of dangerous space heaters.

## Staying Safe Outdoors

Outside the home, make sure all walkways, paths, steps, decks, porches and entranceways have good lighting, solid traction and handrails for support. Keeping sand or rock salt by the door is a good idea for potentially icy weather. If your parent is wheelchair-bound, ramps can be installed for easier access. Exterior motion sensing floodlights will light your parent's way and avoid the necessity of fumbling with keys in the dark.

When it comes to safety in the home, prevention really is the best medicine. Elder-proofing your home before your aging parent moves in will ease the transition, helping them maintain a sense of independence and affording you the peace of mind that comes with knowing you've provided every safeguard for their well-being.