

Room-by-Room Safety Checklist

Print this and walk the house with a pen. Not every change is necessary in every home — fix the immediate dangers first and treat the rest as ongoing work. A house with three changes your parent accepted is safer than one full of equipment they resent.

If you only fix one room, fix the bathroom

It's where the serious falls happen, and these three take about an hour between them. If your parent is resisting changes, this is the room worth spending your goodwill on.

- ☐ **Grab bars in the tub or shower and beside the toilet** — anchored into studs, not suction-cup versions.
- ☐ **Nonslip surface in the tub and on the bathroom floor.**
- ☐ **A motion-activated night light** on the route from bed to bathroom.

Entrances and entryway

- ☐ Steps are even, solid, and in good repair
- ☐ Handrail at the front and back steps
- ☐ Entry is well lit — motion-activated light if possible
- ☐ No step-up threshold to trip on, or it's clearly marked
- ☐ Somewhere to set bags down while unlocking the door
- ☐ House number visible from the street for emergency responders
- ☐ Emergency lockbox so responders can get in without breaking a door

Stairs and hallways

- ☐ Handrails on **both** sides, full length, firmly attached
- ☐ Light switches at the top **and** bottom of the stairs
- ☐ Steps clear — nothing stored on them, ever
- ☐ No loose or frayed carpet on the treads
- ☐ Step edges easy to see; contrast tape if needed
- ☐ Hallways clear of clutter and furniture that narrows the path
- ☐ No electrical cords crossing walkways

Bathroom

- ☐ Grab bars in the tub or shower, anchored into studs
- ☐ Grab bar beside the toilet
- ☐ Nonslip mat or strips in the tub and on the floor
- ☐ Shower chair or bench

- ☐ Handheld showerhead
- ☐ Raised toilet seat if standing up is difficult
- ☐ Night light or motion-activated light
- ☐ Water heater set to prevent scalding
- ☐ Door opens outward or can be unlocked from outside, in case of a fall
- ☐ Everyday items within reach without bending or stretching

Most serious falls in the home happen here. If you can only make changes in one room, this is the room.

Bedroom

- ☐ Lamp or light switch reachable from the bed
- ☐ Clear, lit path from the bed to the bathroom
- ☐ Motion-activated night lights along that path
- ☐ Bed at a height that allows easy standing — feet flat on the floor when seated
- ☐ Phone or medical alert device within reach of the bed
- ☐ No loose rugs beside the bed
- ☐ Clothes and everyday items reachable without a step stool

Kitchen

- ☐ Everyday dishes, food, and pans between waist and shoulder height
- ☐ No step stool needed for anything used regularly
- ☐ Sturdy step stool with a handrail if one is genuinely necessary
- ☐ Good lighting over counters and the stove
- ☐ Nonslip mat at the sink
- ☐ Stove shutoff device or automatic burner timer, if leaving burners on is a concern
- ☐ Fire extinguisher present, in date, and reachable
- ☐ Refrigerator checked periodically for spoiled food

Living areas

- ☐ Loose rugs removed, or secured with nonslip backing
- ☐ Clear walking paths through every room
- ☐ Chairs and sofas high enough to rise from easily; firm arms to push up on
- ☐ Furniture that would hold if leaned on — nothing that rolls or tips
- ☐ Cords routed along walls, never across floors
- ☐ Brighter bulbs throughout
- ☐ Light switches reachable at room entrances

Outdoors

- ☐ Walkways even, with no raised slabs or holes

- ☐ Outdoor lighting on paths, steps, and the driveway
- ☐ Plan in place for snow and ice removal, if relevant
- ☐ Handrails on outdoor steps
- ☐ Hose, tools, and planters kept out of walking paths
- ☐ Yard work assigned to someone — not being quietly attempted

Emergency readiness

- ☐ Wearable medical alert device — and it's actually being worn
- ☐ Automatic fall detection considered
- ☐ Emergency contacts posted somewhere visible
- ☐ Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors tested; batteries current
- ☐ Voice-activated smart speaker for calling help from the floor
- ☐ Water-leak sensor, door or motion sensors if useful
- ☐ Medical alert ID bracelet or necklace if there's a serious condition or allergy
- ☐ **Test every device with your parent doing the testing** — not you demonstrating

A pendant in a drawer protects no one. The best device is the one that gets worn, which sometimes means the plainer, less impressive option.

Beyond the house — ask the doctor about

- ☐ Balance and gait assessment
- ☐ Leg and core strength
- ☐ Vision, including whether the current prescription is still right and whether bifocals cause trouble on stairs
- ☐ Foot pain, numbness, and shoes — slippers with no back or grip are a common culprit
- ☐ Dizziness, and blood pressure drops on standing
- ☐ A full medication review for anything causing drowsiness or affecting balance
- ☐ A referral to a physical or occupational therapist — an OT will assess the actual home, and a PT can build the strength and balance that reduce risk rather than soften the landing

Ask directly whether there have been any falls, and ask more than once. People hide them, because they know what reporting one sets in motion.

Signs the current arrangement has been outgrown

- ☐ Repeated falls
- ☐ Getting lost, including on familiar routes
- ☐ Leaving the stove on
- ☐ Missed or doubled medications
- ☐ Spoiled food; unpaid bills stacking up
- ☐ Weight loss; decline in hygiene
- ☐ Unsafe driving; repeated emergency visits
- ☐ Confusion at night
- ☐ **Caregiver exhaustion**

That last one belongs with the others. If the arrangement only holds because one person is quietly running out, it isn't holding. Recognizing several of these is worth a conversation with a doctor or care manager — not a verdict, and not a deadline.

Help paying for modifications: ramps, walk-in showers, and stairlifts are expensive, but assistance may be available through your state housing finance agency, local social services, community development organizations, or federal programs. Start with the Eldercare Locator — eldercare.acl.gov or 800-677-1116.

Free room-by-room checklists: CDC Check for Safety — cdc.gov/steady/patient-resources

One more thing. If your parent is cognitively intact, they're allowed to make choices you find dangerous. You can advocate, arrange, and install what they'll accept — and then live with the rest. When something eventually happens, it will not be because you missed a hazard. You're reducing risk, not eliminating it, and reducing it is genuinely worth doing.

What still needs doing
