



# Home Safety Guide for Older Adults

*This guide will help you:*

- ✓ Identify hazards in your home
- ✓ Learn how to make simple changes
- ✓ Improve your safety!

Thanks to the Occupational Geriatric Group at the University of Buffalo for permission to reproduce the Home Safety Self Assessment Tool (HSSAT) v.4

# How to Use the Checklist to Identify Home Hazards to Prevent Falls

Use the checklist to find and correct/fix the hazards for every room/area in your home that could cause you to trip or fall. All items are potential risks for falls but if a wheelchair is not used, some items may not apply.

## Steps to use the checklist

### **Step 1:**

Go to each room/area of your home with this checklist; look for the hazards/items that are listed below the picture on each page (Some items may not relate to your home).

### **Step 2:**

If the problem is present in your room/area, check off in the appropriate box. After checking all the problems add them and write the total in the big box (Each item that gets a checkmark is a potential hazard).

### **Step 3:**

Then go through the solutions and take the necessary action to fix those problems that are a potential hazard.

### **Step 4:**

Add the total number of hazards in all the rooms/areas to get a grand total.

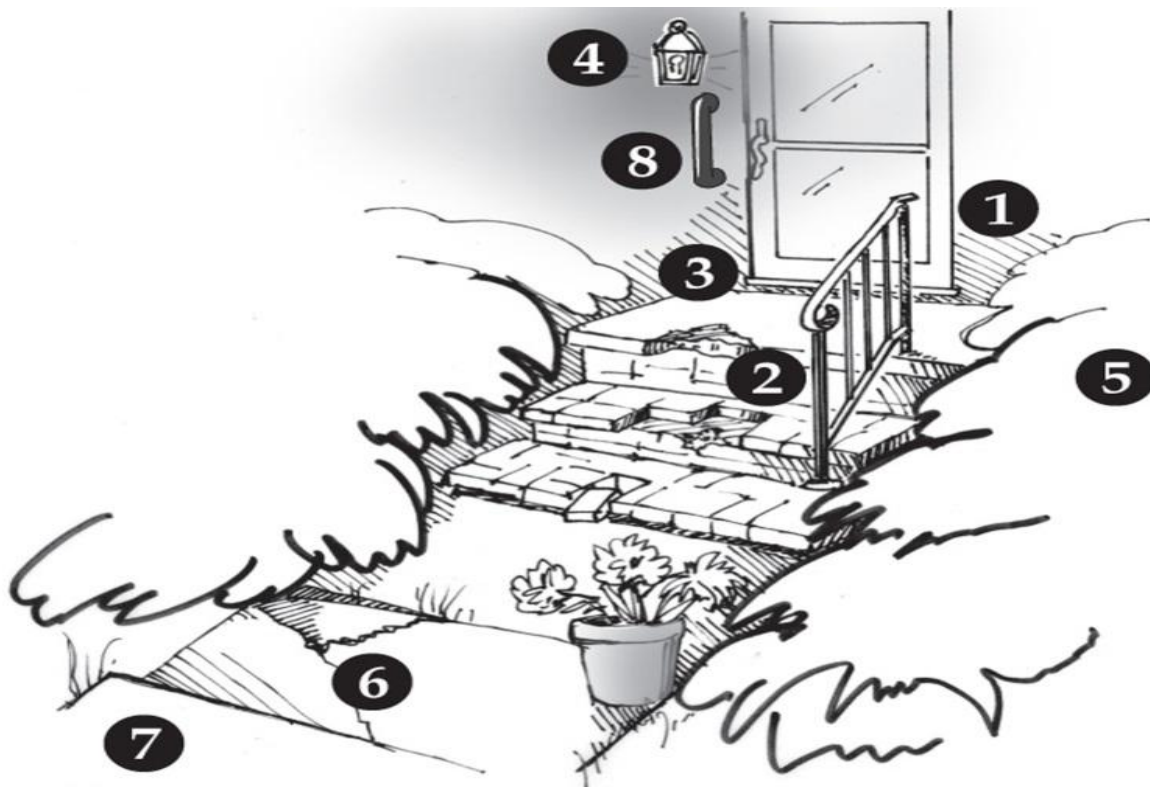
### **Step 5:**

Write down what actions you are planning to take and have already taken to prevent falls.

### **Step 6:**

It may be a good idea to ask your family and friends for a home safety modification or an assistive device for your birthday or holiday present. Also, talk with your friends about home safety. It can be a great gift for them to know how to prevent future falls.

## Entrance to Front Door and Front Yard



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Lack of railings or unstable railing<br><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Unsafe steps (too steep/cracked)<br><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Unmarked or raised threshold<br><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Lack of lighting at night | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Lack of a ramp for a wheelchair<br><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Uneven/cracked pavement<br><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Ice or snow on driveway/walkway<br><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Lack of an outdoor grab bar |
|---|--|

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\*The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page.

# Solutions for the Problems in Entrance to Front Door and Front Yard

## **1. Lack of railings or unstable railing**

Add at least one railing, ideally one on each wall.  
Have unstable railing stabilized.

## **2. Unsafe steps (too steep, cracked, chipped, etc.)**

Have damaged or broken steps repaired.

## **3. Unmarked or raised threshold**

Mark end of steps or thresholds with contrasting tape or paint color to increase awareness of changes in height.

## **4. Lack of lighting at night**

Add an outdoor light fixture if not present.  
Add a sensor light that automatically turns on and off.

## **5. Lack of a ramp for a wheelchair**

Have a remodeler or home contractor construct a ramp that will allow wheelchair access in and out of the home.

## **6. Unsafe pavement (uneven or cracked)**

Have uneven or cracked pavement repaired.  
Avoid these areas if possible when walking to and from the home.  
Contact local government for repair if it is a sidewalk or driveway end.

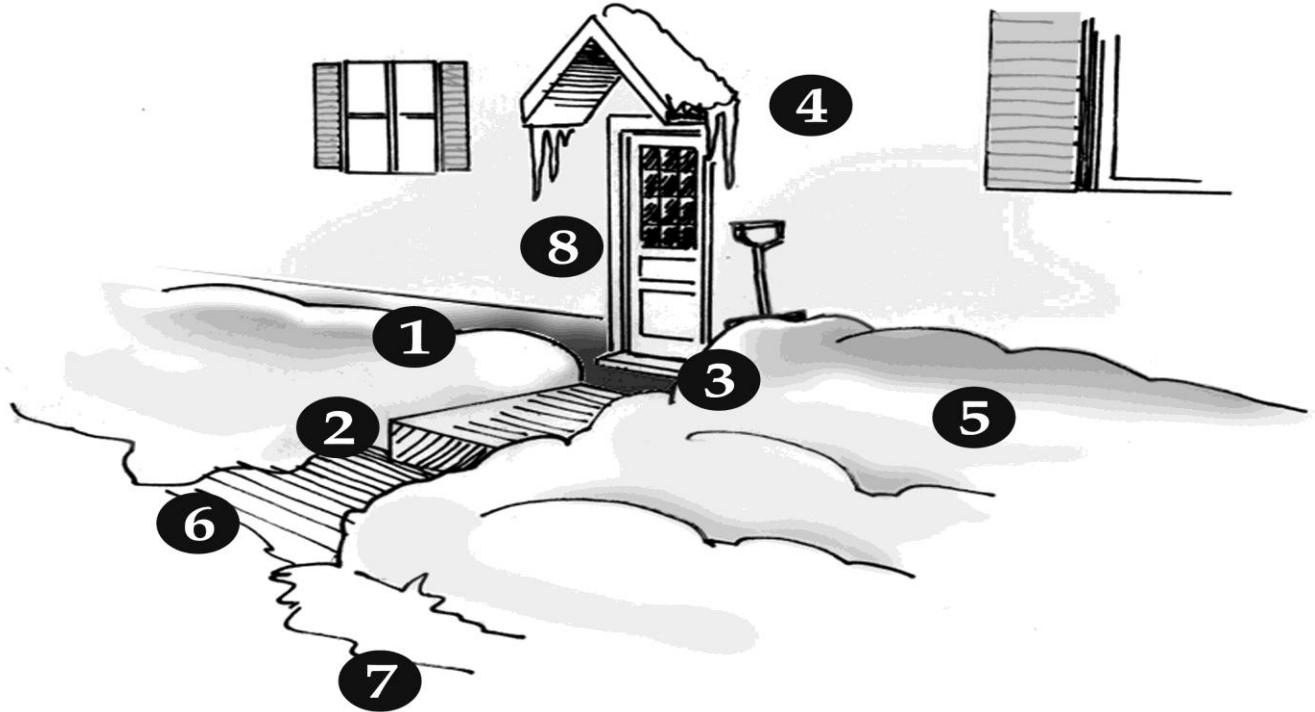
## **7. Ice or snow on driveway or walkway**

Use a snow melter.  
Have snow/ice removed by a neighbor or service.

## **8. Lack of an outdoor grab bar**

Add an outdoor grab bar next to the door.

## Entrance to Back/Side Door



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Lack of railings or unstable railing<br><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Unsafe steps (too steep/cracked/chipped)<br><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Unmarked or raised threshold<br><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Lack of lighting at night | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Lack of a ramp for a wheelchair<br><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Uneven/cracked pavement<br><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Ice or snow walkway<br><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Lack of an outdoor grab bar |
|---|--|

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page

# Solutions for the Problems in Entrance to Back/Side Door

## **1. Lack of railings or unstable railing**

Add at least one railing, ideally one on each wall.  
Have unstable railing stabilized.

## **2. Unsafe steps (too steep, cracked, chipped, etc.)**

Have damaged or broken steps repaired.

## **3. Unmarked or raised threshold**

Mark end of steps or thresholds with contrasting tape or paint color to increase awareness of change in height.

## **4. Lack of lighting at night**

Add an outdoor light fixture if not present.  
Add a sensor light that automatically turns on and off.

## **5. Lack of a ramp for a wheelchair**

Have a remodeler or home contractor construct a ramp that will allow wheelchair access in and out of the home.

## **6. Unsafe pavement (uneven or cracked)**

Have uneven or cracked pavement repaired.  
Avoid these areas if possible when walking to and from the home.  
Contact local government for repair if it is a sidewalk or driveway end.

## **7. Ice or snow on walkway**

Use snow melter.  
Have snow/ice removed by a neighbor or service.

## **8. Lack of an outdoor grab bar**

Add grab bar next to the door.

# Hallway or Foyer



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

1. Uneven or slippery flooring

3. Dark or poor lighting

2. Cluttered area

4. Lack of access to ceiling

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page



## **Solutions for the Problems in Hallway or Foyer**

### **1. Unsafe flooring (slippery, uneven carpeting, etc.)**

Make sure floor surfaces are dry.

If you have a carpet, make sure that the patterns are not too busy.

Have carpet stretched or removed to eliminate wrinkles or bumps.

Add a carpet runner to slippery hallways or foyers and secure to the floor.

### **2. Cluttered area**

Eliminate clutter on floors by removing and/or organizing items.

Example: shoe tray, hooks for umbrella.

### **3. Dark or poor lighting**

Increase wattage to allowable limits in lights.

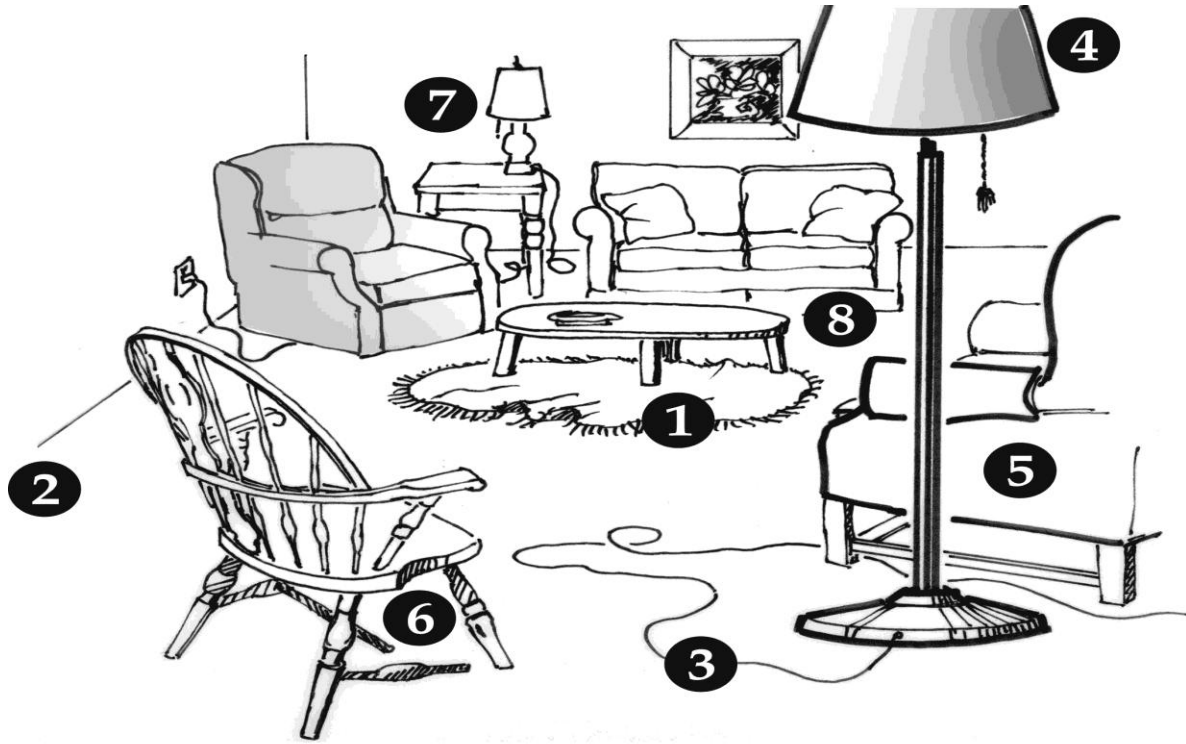
Add additional overhead or wall lighting.

### **4. Lack of access to ceiling light**

Ask another person to change the light.

Add removable wall lights to poorly lit areas.

## Living Room



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

1. Presence of throw or scatter rug

5. Presence of unstable furniture

2. Presence of clutter

6. Presence of unstable chair

3. Presence of electric cords across the floor

7. Difficult to access light switches

4. Poor lighting

8. Not enough space to move around

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page

# **Solutions for the Problems in Living Room**

## **1. Presence of throw or scatter rug**

Remove a scatter rug or use a double sided rug tape or rug pad to secure the rug to the floor.

## **2. Presence of clutter**

Eliminate clutter on floor surfaces by placing items on shelves or storage.

Consider donating or throwing out the items you no longer use.

Avoid carpets with confusing patterns.

## **3. Presence of electric cords across the floor**

Run your cords behind furnishings. Use extension cords to accomplish this.

Rearrange items that must be plugged in to areas near an outlet.

## **4. Poor lighting**

Increase wattage to allowable limits in lamps/lights.

Add additional lamps or wall/overhead lights.

## **5. Presence of unstable furniture (chair, table, etc.)**

Place a block under the shorter leg.

If the chair or table is broken, have it repaired or replaced.

## **6. Presence of unsafe chair (too low, too high, without arms)**

If the chair is too low, add a furniture leg riser to raise the height.

A chair that is too high or without arms should not be used, as it will not provide you with sufficient stability to get in and out of the chair.

## **7. Difficult to access light switches**

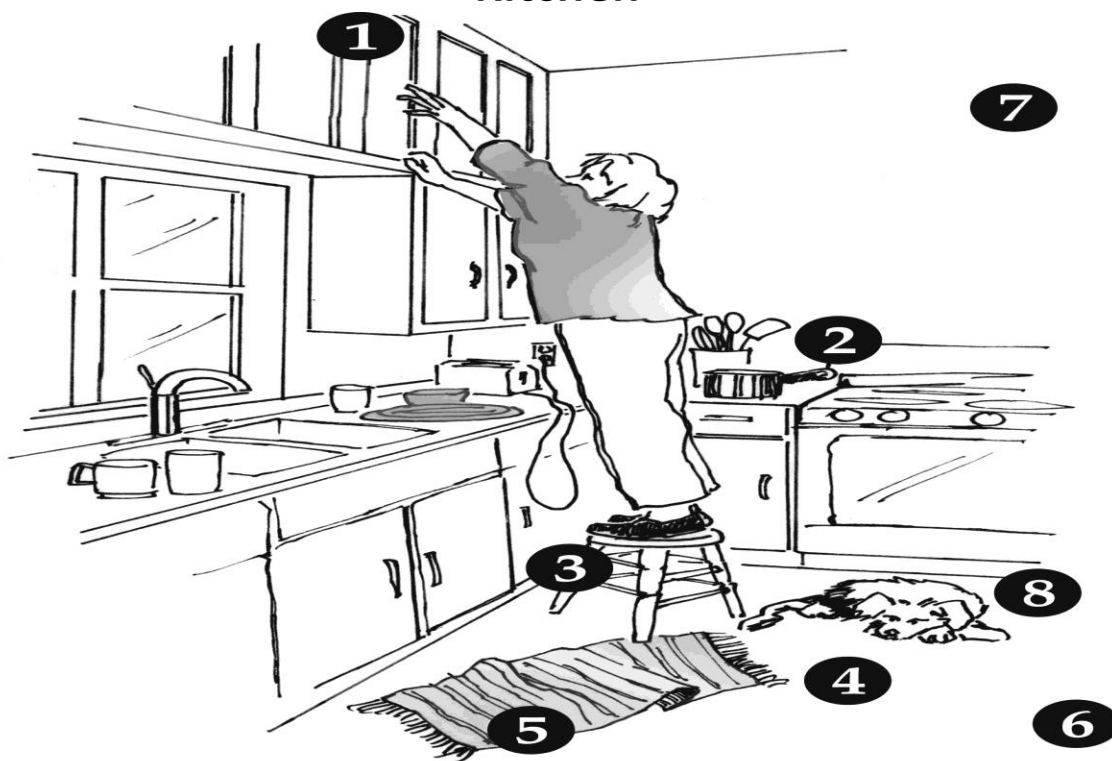
Add "clapper" light switch control to lamps. There are other remote control switching options for operating the lights.

Rearrange furnishings to allow quick access to wall switch or lamps.

## **8. Not enough space to move around**

Remove clutter or excess furniture that prevents you from moving around the room easily. Some items may be rearranged, but you may want to donate or throw out other items you don't really need or use

# Kitchen



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Cabinet too high or low                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Presence of throw/ scatter rug                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Not enough counter space                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Presence of slippery floor                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Using a stool or a chair to reach things | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Poor lighting                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Not enough room to maneuver              | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Presence of a pet underfoot when preparing meals |

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page

# Solutions for the Problems in Kitchen

## **1. Cabinet too high or too low**

Move items to the shelves closest to the counter.

Add hooks to the wall for pots and pans you use frequently.

## **2. Not enough counter space**

Make sure available counter space is cleared of clutter. Use Lazy Susan.

Move kitchen table closer to counter for additional work space.

Use a rolling cart for added work space.

## **3. Using a stool to a chair to reach things**

Move items to lower shelves.

Replace the stool with a sturdy step ladder.

## **4. Not enough room to maneuver**

Eliminate clutter or excessive furniture (extra kitchen chairs, etc.) to add space.

Remove a leaf from the table and push it closer to the wall.

## **5. Presence of a throw/scatter rug**

Remove a scatter rug or use a double sided rug tape or rug pad to secure the rug to the floor.

## **6. Presence of slippery floor**

Do not walk on a wet floor.

Wear comfortable and fit shoes or socks with a non-skid sole.

Change flooring surface to one that is less slippery.

## **7. Poor lighting**

Increase wattage of bulbs to allowable level.

Add under counter lighting.

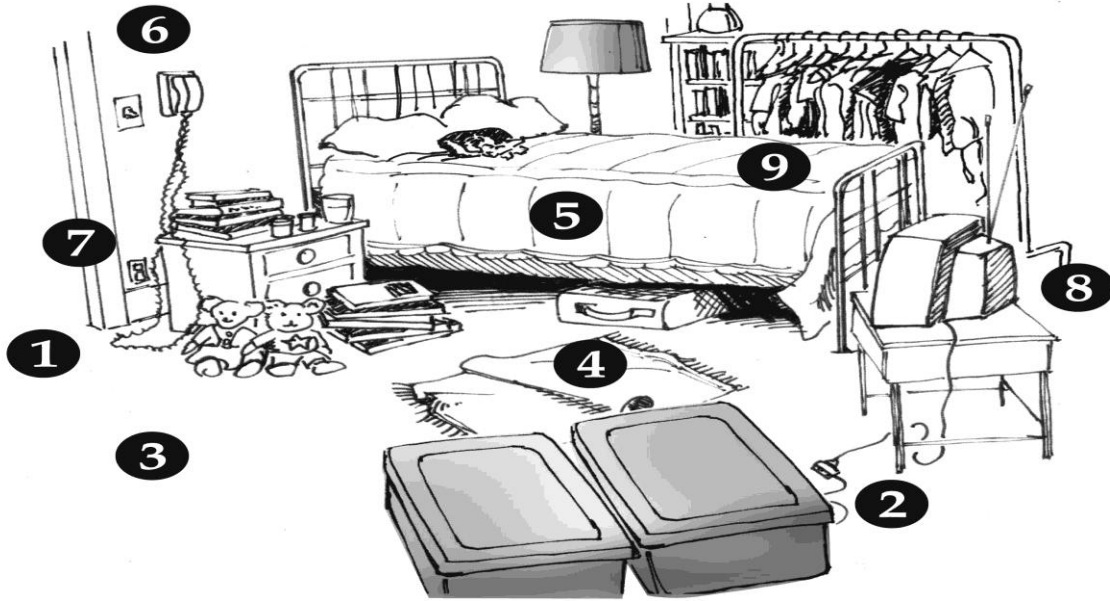
Add additional overhead lighting.

## **8. Presence of a pet underfoot when preparing meals**

Remove the pet from the kitchen while cooking and add a pet gate to the entry ways of the kitchen.

Put the pet outside or in a crate.

# Bedroom



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Presence of clutter                         | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Lack of a telephone near the bed                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Presence of electric cords across the floor | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Lack of nightlight  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Unsafe carpet (uneven, curled up)           | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Arrangement that causes difficulty to reach items (TV remote, lamp) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Presence of throw/scatter rug               | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Lack of device to get in/out of bed                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Height of bed (too low/high)                |   |

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page

# Solutions for the Problems in Bedroom

## **1. Presence of clutter**

Eliminate clutter on floor surfaces by placing items on shelves or storage.

## **2. Presence of electric cords across the floor**

Run your cords behind furnishings. Use extension cords to accomplish this. Rearrange items that must be plugged in to areas near an outlet.

## **3. Unsafe carpet (uneven, torn, curled up, etc.)**

Have carpet stretched or removed to eliminate wrinkles or bumps.

## **4. Presence of throw/scatter rug**

Remove all scatter and throw rugs or use a double sided rug tape or a rug pad to secure the rug to floor.

## **5. Height of bed (too high or low)**

Too low (your knees are above the hips when sitting at the edge of the bed):  
Use bed risers below bed legs to raise height.

Too high (your legs do not touch the floor when sitting at the edge of the bed):  
Remove bed frame or use a lower profile mattress or box spring.

## **6. Lack of a telephone near the bed**

Place a cordless type or cell phone next to your bed at night or during naps.

## **7. Lack of a nightlight**

Place at least two nightlights in the bedroom to illuminate the room at night. Add additional nightlights along the hall or path to the bathroom. Also add one nightlight in the bathroom.

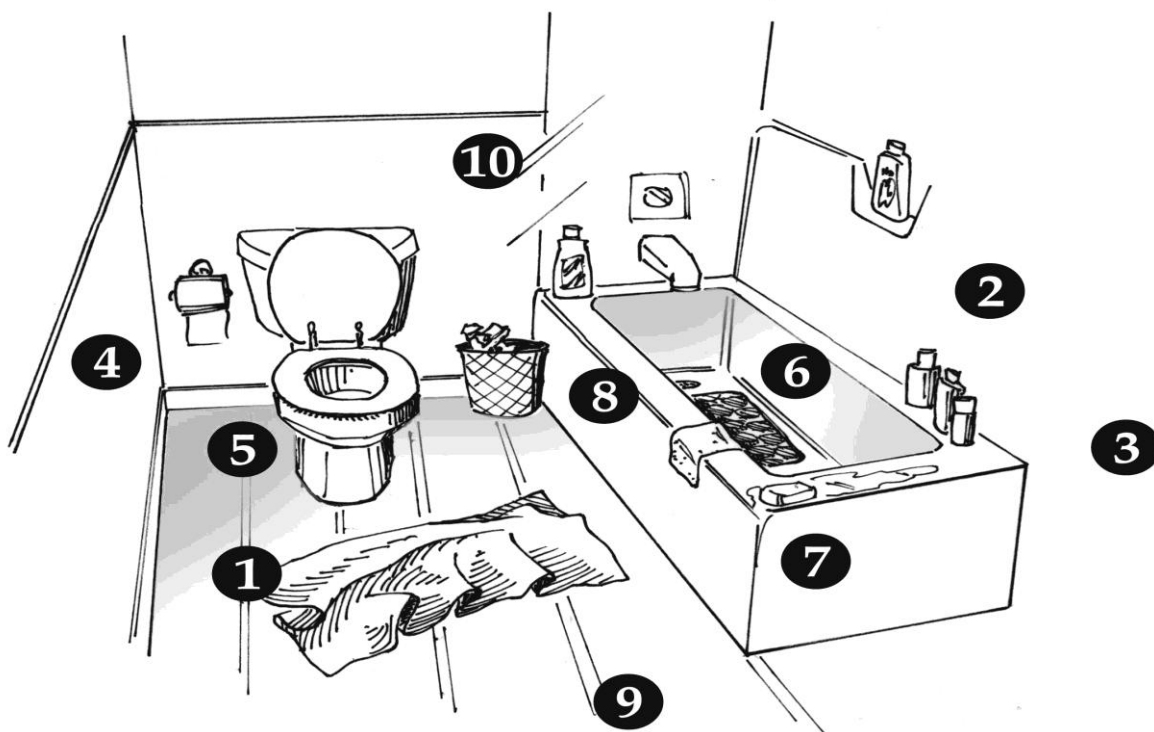
## **8. Arrangement that causes difficulty to reach commonly used items such as a TV remote, medications, lamp, glasses, magnifier, etc. at night**

Place these items on your bedside table. If you don't have a table, you may put a rolling cart or shelving unit next to the bed.

## **9. Lack of a device to help get in and out the bed**

Purchase a half bedrail or a bed cane that can slide between mattress and box spring.

## Bathroom



The list identifies the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Presence of unsafe bath rugs<br><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Lack of grab bars in the tub<br><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Lack of grab bars in the shower area<br><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Lack of grab bars near the toilet<br><input type="checkbox"/> 5. Toilet is too high or low | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Slippery tub (lack of bath mat, etc)<br><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Claw foot/tub high to get into<br><input type="checkbox"/> 8. Lack of bath chair in shower area<br><input type="checkbox"/> 9. Clutter<br><input type="checkbox"/> 10. Incorrect placement of grab bars |
|--|---|

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page



# Solutions for the Problems in Bathroom

## **1. Presence of unsafe bath rugs.**

Use a bath rug with non-skid bottom.

## **2. Lack of grab bars in the tub**

Add a bath grab bar on the wall or a clamp-on grab bar to the tub.

## **3. Lack of grab bars in the shower area**

Add grab bars to the wall near the shower and on the wall where the bath faucets are.

## **4. Lack of grab bars near the toilet**

Add a grab bar next to the toilet wall or toilet safety grab bars that attach at the toilet seat screws.

## **5. Toilet is too high or too low**

Add a raised toilet seat for seats that are too low.

Consider a lower profile toilet if it is too high.

## **6. Slippery tub (lack of bath mat, etc.)**

Add a rubber bath mat or adhesive non-skid decals to the bottom of the tub.

## **7. Claw foot or other type of tub that is too high to get into easily**

Add a tub transfer bench to slide into the tub area or replace with a lower tub.

## **8. Lack of bath chair in the tub or shower area or tub transfer bench**

Add a bath chair along with grab bars to the tub or shower area. A tub transfer bench is helpful if you have difficulty stepping into the tub area, because you can sit and slide over into the tub area.

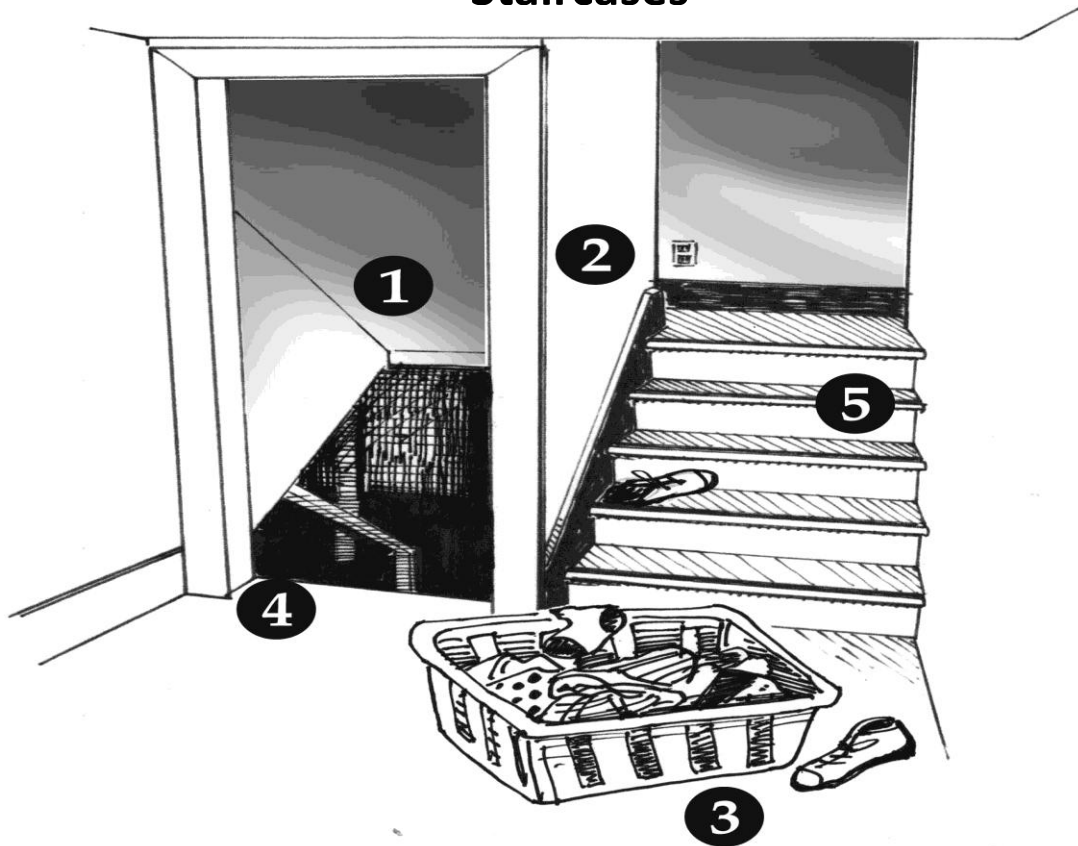
## **9. Clutter**

Remove clutter from all floor areas to drawers or closets. Inexpensive plastic cabinets or rolling units can be purchased to store bath items.

## **10. Incorrect placement of grab bars**

If permanently installed, hire a qualified professional to change the grab bars to the correct location and angle.

# Staircases



The list identifies all the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Poor or lack of lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Steps too steep                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Lack of railings         | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Slippery steps without tread/ carpet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Clutter                  |  |

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page.

# **Solutions for the Problems in Staircases**

## **1. Lack of or poor lighting**

Increase wattage to allowable limits in lights.

Add additional overhead or wall lighting.

## **2. Lack of railings**

Add at least one railing the entire length of the wall, ideally one on each side.

## **3. Clutter**

Eliminate clutter on floors by removing and/or organizing items in areas near the stairs.

## **4. Steps too steep**

Use railings for stability.

Walk slowly up and down stairs with lights on.

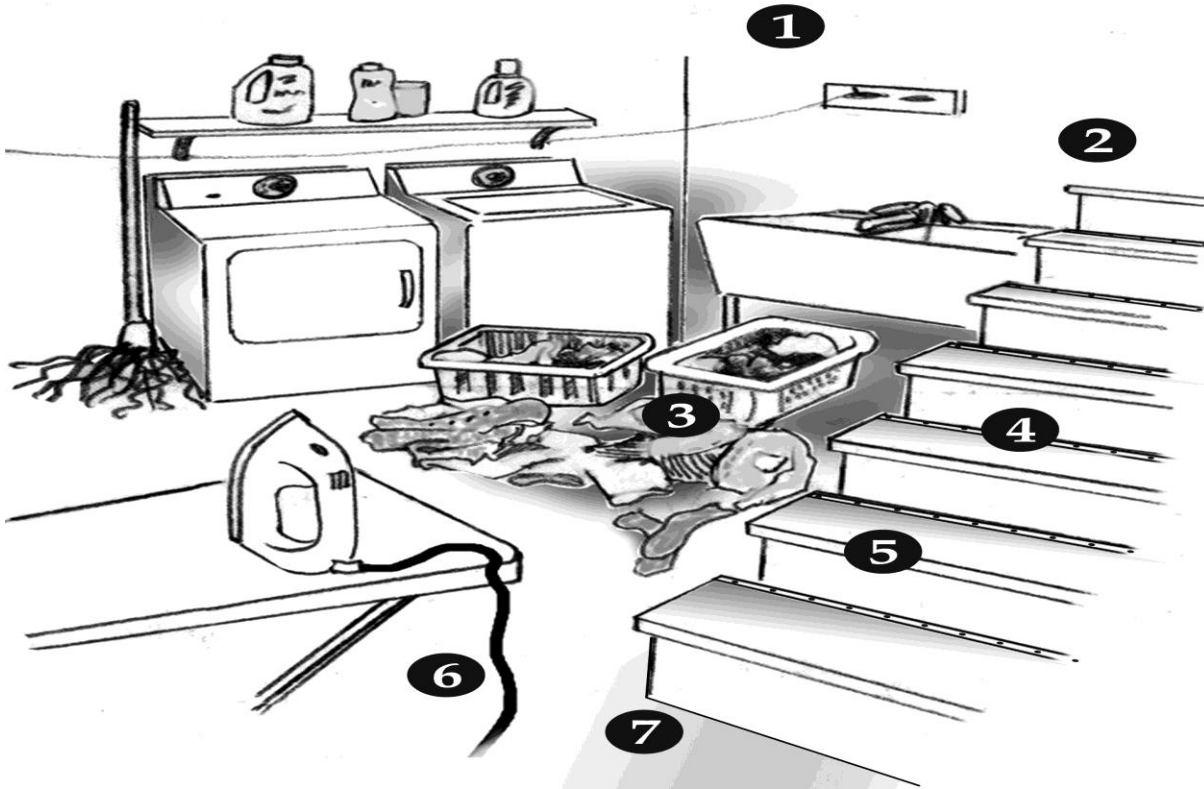
Have others carry heavy or large items up or down the stairs.

Reduce daily use of stairs to reduce risk of falls.

## **5. Slippery steps without tread or carpet or luminous light**

Add adhesive stair treads or carpet runner.

## Laundry Room or Basement



The list identifies all the potential home hazards that may cause a fall. If the item applies to your home place a check in the box. Then add the total number of checks and enter it in the box below.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Poor or lack of lighting<br><input type="checkbox"/> 2. Lack of railings<br><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Clutter<br><input type="checkbox"/> 4. Steps too steep | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Slippery steps without carpet / luminous light<br><input type="checkbox"/> 6. Presence of cords across the floor<br><input type="checkbox"/> 7. Same colored floor at bottom of stairs |
|--|--|

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of problems

\* The numbers correspond to the hazard in the picture and solutions on the following page

# **Solutions for the Problems in Laundry Room**

## **1. Poor or lack of lighting**

Increase wattage to allowable limits in lights.  
Add additional overhead or wall lighting.

## **2. Lack of railings**

Add at least one railing the entire length of the wall, ideally one on each side.

## **3. Clutter**

Eliminate clutter on floors by removing and/or organizing items in areas near the stairs.

## **4. Steps too steep**

Use railings for stability.  
Walk slowly up and down stairs with lights on.  
Have others carry heavy or large items up or down the stairs.  
Reduce daily use of stairs to reduce risk of falls.

## **5. Slippery steps without tread or carpet or luminous light**

Add adhesive stair treads or carpet runner.

## **6. Presence of cords across the floor**

Run your cords behind furnishings. Use extension cords to accomplish this.  
Rearrange items that must be plugged in to areas near an outlet.

## **7. Same colored floor at bottom of stairs**

Have the bottom of the stairs painted a different color so that you are aware of the last step.

# Total Number of Home Hazards

Transfer all the total scores of each room/area from pages 2-20 to the appropriate lines and add all the scores to get a grand total. Three blocks for each area are provided for you to keep records of your assessments and improvements for three occasions.

<b>Date</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Entrance to Front Door and Front Yard</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Entrance to Back/Side Door</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Hallway or Foyer</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Living Room</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Kitchen</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Bedroom</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Bathroom</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Staircases</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Laundry Room/Basement</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Grand Total</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## Tips for Fall Prevention

1. Provide seating at the entrance to the home, so that a person can rest or put down things in their hand.
2. Small icicles that are within easy reach should be removed so that entry to and exit from the home are safe. Do not try to remove bigger and dangerous icicles by yourself. Instead have them removed by someone else.
3. Always wear shoes that fit properly and have nonskid soles.
4. Install light switches at the top and bottom of all stairs.
5. Use lights with high wattage bulbs to see more clearly.
7. Keep emergency flashlights near the bed to help locate the light switches and provide illumination in case of a power outage.
8. When climbing or descending stairs, you should never be in a hurry to pick up a phone. It can wait!
9. Remember the number of stairs and count each step when climbing or descending.
10. While carrying things, always keep one hand empty so that it is possible to grab on to something in case support is needed.
11. Electrical and phone cords should be removed from walkways to reduce the risk of falls.
12. Regularly used items in the kitchen should be placed where they are easily accessible.
13. The use of a handheld shower makes it safer and easier to take a shower.
14. The size and contents of a laundry basket should not be too heavy. Use a small basket for comfortable use.
15. For emergency purposes there should be a phone in the bathroom, attic, and laundry room.

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### **Falls Prevention**

Step Up to Stop Falls  
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