

# Modifying Your Home for Healthy Aging



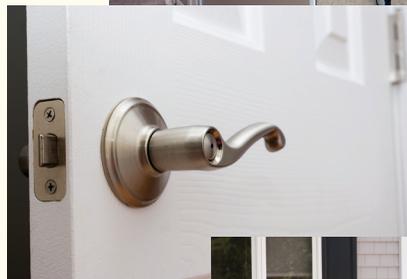
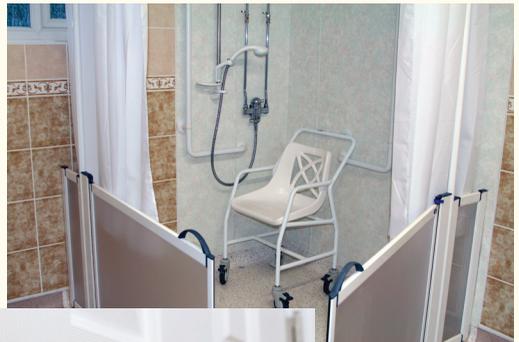
Connecting You to Community Services

1 (800) 677-1116  
[eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)



**R**esearch shows that most older adults want to live in their homes and communities for as long as possible.<sup>1</sup> Aging at home brings with it many benefits—both to older adults and the communities in which they live. A longtime home is a place of comfort and memories—and can be a source of connections to family members, neighbors, friends, places of worship, community groups, familiar shops and health providers.

However, most homes were not built to support the mobility, sensory and cognitive changes that often accompany aging. As one ages, everyday tasks such as climbing the stairs, standing up in the shower, getting in and out of the bathtub, and reaching objects in kitchen cabinets or other places in the home can become more difficult.



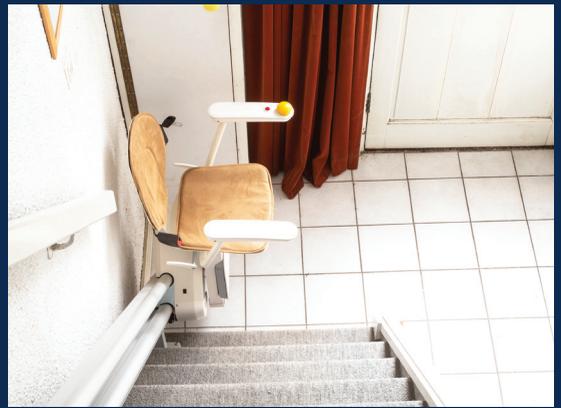
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/community/info-2018/2018-home-community-preference.html>

## What are Home Modifications?

Home modifications help make homes better suited to meet the changing needs of the people who live in them—and can help prevent falls, maximize independence and support caregiving. Home modifications range from the simple—clearing clutter off the floor, improving lighting or removing rugs to help prevent falls—to more complex—installing a stair lift or renovating a bathroom to make it accessible for someone with mobility limitations. Making these and other home modifications can help older adults continue to perform daily tasks such as cooking, using the toilet and bathing.

It is important to note that home modifications do not include repairing a roof or making other structural changes, but some homes may need repairs before they can be modified to meet the needs of the older adults who live in them. For example, a leaky pipe will need to be fixed before a bathtub or shower can be made accessible.

Many older adults who need to modify their homes to meet their changing needs do not know where to turn for advice or assistance—or even what modifications their homes may need. Fortunately, the **Eldercare Locator**, a public service of the U.S. Administration for Community Living, connects older adults and caregivers across the country to Area Agencies on Aging and other local resources that can help ensure their homes meet their evolving needs.



## Types of Home Modifications

- Installing grab bars near the toilet, in the shower and/or bathtub
- Installing handheld shower heads and/or shower seats
- Removing or securing rugs to the floor
- Adding high-contrast non-skid tape to stairs
- Adding handrails to both sides of staircases
- Installing non-skid flooring or low-pile carpet
- Improving lighting throughout the home
- Installing ramps or no-step entries to assist individuals using wheelchairs, walkers, or canes
- Widening the width of doorways and/or hallways to accommodate assistive devices
- Installing variable height countertops in the kitchen that allow an individual to sit or stand while cooking

The above list is just a sampling of the modifications that can help older adults continue living in their homes as they age. It is important to understand that home modification is a process that starts with identifying what modifications are desired or needed by the individuals living in the home.

## Determining What Home Modifications Are Right for You

To help older adults and their caregivers determine which modifications are right for them, the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology recommends using a checklist to help decide which modifications are most useful. In many cases, it can be helpful to work with an occupational therapist who can conduct a home assessment, evaluate a person's ability to carry out tasks, identify potential hazards and recommend modifications. Depending on age and income, older adults may qualify to have an aging or home care expert provide advice and recommend a housing professional (e.g., contractor, remodeler or handyperson) to make the changes. The Eldercare Locator can connect individuals seeking home modifications to local experts who can help with the home modification process.

## Paying for Home Modifications

While some of the home modifications described in this brochure have little to no cost, others may be beyond a person's ability to pay. Fortunately, the Eldercare Locator can connect older adults and caregivers to public and private resources that can help pay for certain home modifications.

### Tips for Finding a Home Modification Provider

The following suggestions can help older adults and caregivers find a provider to make home modifications:

- Contact the Eldercare Locator to find your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA), Center for Independent Living (CIL) or State Assistive Technology Act Program. These entities may provide or connect older adults and caregivers to home modification services, referrals and financial assistance for home modification services.
- Contact a Rebuilding Together affiliate near you. Many Rebuilding Together affiliates specialize in providing home modification services for older homeowners who may need financial assistance in making changes to their homes. To locate an affiliate near you, visit: [www.rebuildingtogether.org/find-your-local-affiliate](http://www.rebuildingtogether.org/find-your-local-affiliate).
- Get recommendations from friends and family members who have had similar work done in their homes.

### Tips for Working with a Home Modification Provider

- Be specific about the home modifications that you would like to have installed.
- Ask for a written agreement that contains details on the specific home modifications being made.
- If asked, provide only a small down payment and pay the remainder once the work has been completed to your expectations.
- Ensure that the provider is trained and has experience in making the needed home modifications by asking for references and checking reviews from the Better Business Bureau or other reputable sources.

For more tips, view *Home Improvement Scams: Tools to Reduce Your Risk*, an Eldercare Locator publication that is available online at [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov).



## Living at Home After Modification: What's Next?

Modifying homes to meet the changing needs of older adults is not necessarily a one-time event. As functionality changes over time, other modifications might be helpful. In such cases, another in-home assessment may need to be conducted.



## Questions to Ask During a Home Modification Assessment

Whether an assessment is conducted by older adults and caregivers themselves, an occupational therapist, or other aging professional, the following basic questions should be asked to ensure that relevant factors are considered.

- Can you get into and out of the residence easily and safely?
- If the home has stairs, are there rails on both sides of the stairs?
- Do you need help standing up from a seated position?
- Is there enough lighting in hallways and other places in the home? Can you safely navigate the home during the night when it is dark?
- Are there rugs or other items on the floors that may cause a fall?
- Is there a need for supportive and safety features in the bathroom?

For a more detailed list of questions and links to other resources, visit [https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Home\\_Modification\\_Resources.aspx](https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Resources/Factsheets/Home_Modification_Resources.aspx)



Connecting You to Community Services

## Eldercare Locator

1 (800) 677-1116 (Monday–Friday, 9:00 am – 8:00 pm ET)  
[eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

Launched in 1991, the Eldercare Locator is the only national information and referral resource to provide support to consumers across the spectrum of issues affecting older Americans. The Locator was established and is funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living and is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).



The Eldercare Locator's website contains helpful information that can help older adults and caregivers determine which home modifications they need. **Preventing Falls at Home** is a brochure that provides information on recommended steps, such as annual vision exams, that can be taken to reduce the incidence of falls in the home. The **Caregiver Corner** of the Eldercare Locator's website contains a host of information on resources that can support caregivers as they help older adults stay safe in their homes.



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## National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) [n4a.org](http://n4a.org)

The mission of n4a is to build the capacity of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American aging programs so they can better help older adults and people with disabilities live with dignity and choices in their homes and communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### The University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, Fall Prevention Center of Excellence [www.homemods.org](http://www.homemods.org)

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School of Gerontology

The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence (FPCE), based at the University of Southern California Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, promotes aging in place and independent living for persons of all ages and abilities. With support from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, it offers research, training, and technical assistance opportunities for the Aging Network. FPCE also serves as an information clearinghouse on home modification to equip professionals and consumers with a comprehensive inventory of resources such as a National Directory of Home Modification and Repair Resources.

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