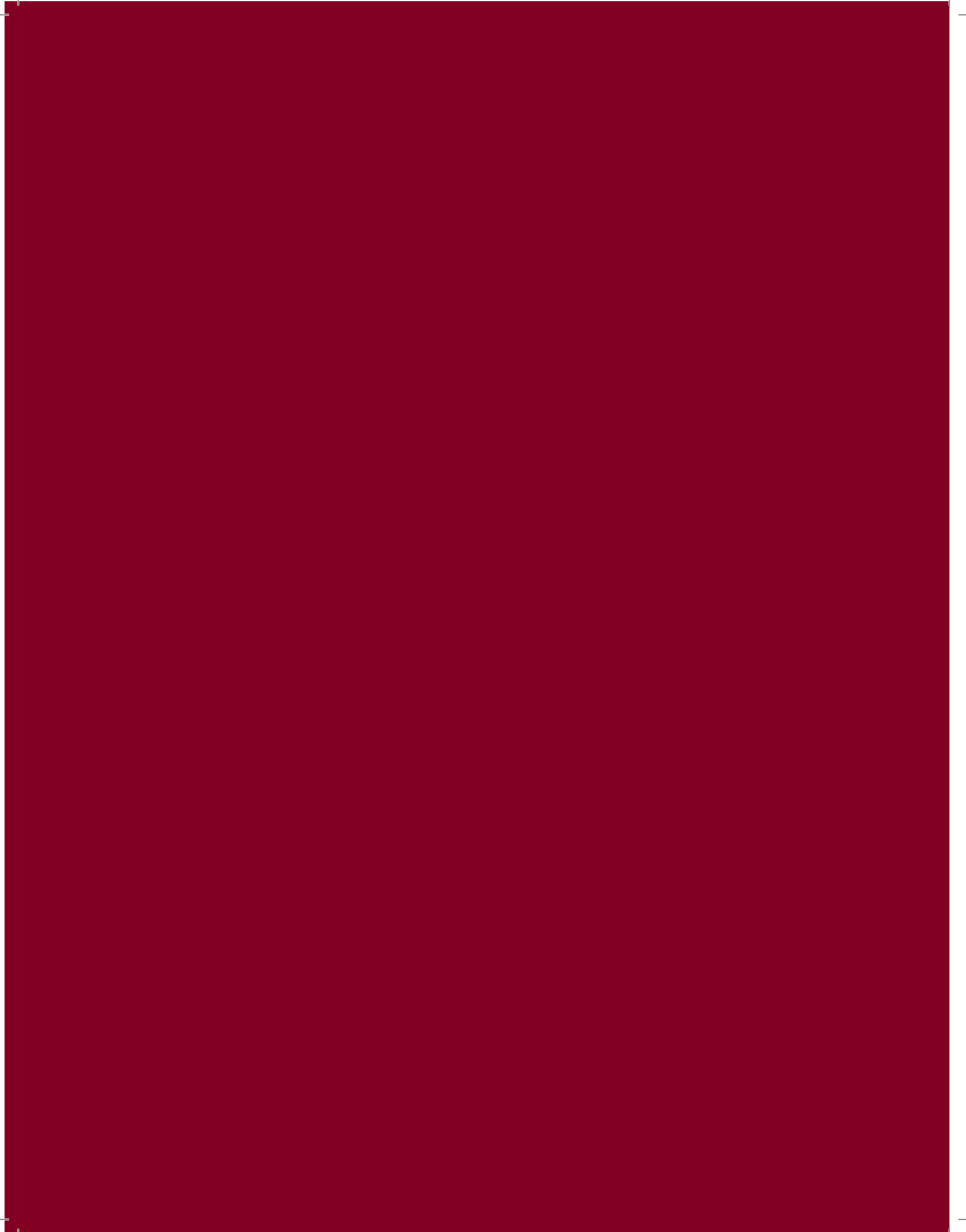


# The AARP Home Fit Guide

*Information and Tips for a Comfortable, Safe, and Livable Home*





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## INTRODUCTION

We love our homes. It doesn't matter if you own your home or rent, live in a small studio apartment or a grand mansion, chances are your home means more to you than just the place where you live, keep your clothes, or receive your mail.



Whatever its size, our home is our castle—the place of cherished memories and life experiences, and our refuge where we can be ourselves, relax, raise a family, or plant a garden.

A survey conducted in 2010 reconfirmed what previous AARP surveys have told us—nearly 90 percent of people 45+ want to remain in their current home and community for as long as possible. AARP is therefore pleased to bring you this collection of home-related information and tips that can help you keep your home in top form for comfort, safety, and livability.

The information and suggestions included in this booklet are designed to help you recognize all the great ways your home can be designed or updated to support your needs and lifestyle at any age. The suggestions included here range from simple tasks to more complicated projects that may require professional help. If you are at all unsure of the level of skill needed, or are uncomfortable about the amount of physical effort a project could take, then it is best to call in a professional. Information about professionals such as certified aging-in-place specialists (CAPS) and occupational therapists are included along with AARP's seven steps to hiring a contractor.

Start today and make your home fit your current and future needs and lifestyle. You'll be glad you did.

## HOME AND COMMUNITY LIVABILITY

We all want to live in a home that fits our needs and lifestyle. Unfortunately, most of us don't discuss or think about certain aspects of our homes until a crisis occurs and it becomes obvious we are living in a place that no longer matches our needs and abilities. We often forget our homes are aging along with us and, in many cases, our homes aren't aging as well as we are!

One example is many homes lack a step-free entry into the home, either through an entrance from the outside or through the garage. This is an inconvenience not only to a parent or grandparent pushing a stroller but also to visitors who can't or have difficulty climbing stairs. A well-designed home, or one that has been updated to accommodate the needs of people of all ages and abilities, gives everyone who lives there and visits independence. More importantly, it allows everyone the freedom to spend time enjoying each other.

If you want to stay in your current home and community for as long as possible as most people do, you need to ask yourself if your home will continue to match your needs as your lifestyle changes over time. Consider your community as well. Livable communities feature homes that anyone can live in comfortably and safely. They also include easy access to shopping, entertainment, health services, and a variety of transportation options that can get you to the places you want to go if you can't or don't wish to drive.

Take a fresh look at your current home and community and see if it matches your needs now and will continue to do so in the years to come. Livable homes and communities empower you to remain independent and engaged in your community in addition to offering a better quality of life.



## GOOD HOME DESIGN

One way to make a home livable for everyone is to incorporate design principles and features—often called universal design. Universal design is about creating a home that is adaptable, flexible, safe, and easy-to-use for all residents and visitors, regardless of age, size, or ability. Universal design features and products are attractive and stylish, come at all price points and, when incorporated into a home correctly, are invisible.

### Features and Products

Good design features are those components of a home that work well for everybody, but especially for the people that live there. Having universal design features and products in a home can increase comfort and safety, help prevent injuries, promote independence, and enhance flexibility. Examples of universal design features and products include:

#### Entrances

- At least one step-free entrance into the main floor of the home
- Plenty of clear, level space (5 feet x 5 feet) inside and outside the entry door for easy maneuvering while opening and closing the door
- Walkways and sidewalks that are at least 36 inches wide and level or slightly sloping
- Wide or double doors with lever handles, dead bolt, security peephole, and easy-to-use locks
- Bright lighting outside and inside the entryway
- Large, easy-to-read house numbers located in a prominent place that can be seen from the street
- Covered entryway or porch to protect from the elements

#### Floor Plan

- Kitchen facilities, full bath, and bedroom located on the entry floor level
- Clear, maneuverable floor space in kitchen and bathroom

#### Throughout the Home

- Interior doorways 36 inches wide
- Hallways 42 inches wide



Jay L. Clendinning/Aurora

- Rocker panel light switches placed 36-44 inches above the floor, electrical outlets placed 18-24 inches above the floor, and thermostats placed 44-48 inches above the floor
- Lever door and faucet handles
- Handrails mounted on both sides of stairs
- Non-slip flooring throughout the home, especially in bathrooms, kitchen, and laundry
- Tightly woven, low pile carpeting that is easy to walk on or roll over
- Easy-to-grip D-shaped cabinet and drawer handles
- Bright, non-glare lighting
- Easy open windows

### **Bathroom**

- At least one full bathroom on the main level
- Plenty of clear floor space (30 x 48 inches) for maneuvering between bathroom fixtures and a 60 inch square turning space
- No threshold walk-in or roll-in shower with non-slip flooring and a bath seat in tub or built in bench in shower to allow for seated bathing
- Adjustable height handheld showerhead
- Reinforced blocking in walls to accommodate future addition of grab bars if needed
- Easy-to-reach anti-scald faucets with lever style handles on sink and in bathtub or shower
- Raised comfort height toilet with seat 17 to 19 inches off the floor

### **Kitchen**

- Anti-scald faucet with single lever-style handle
- Easy access kitchen storage including pull-out or pull-down shelves, adjustable height shelves, and Lazy Susans in corner cabinets
- Multi-height countertops with rounded edges and some with open space underneath so one can work while seated
- Pull-out drawers and shelves in base cabinets that close automatically
- Raised dishwasher to reduce bending
- Oven with shelf or counter close by for easy handling of hot foods
- Side-by-side or drawer-style refrigerator

### **Laundry Room**

- Front loading washer and dryer on raised platform
- Multi-level shelving and work surfaces



## ASSESSING YOUR HOME FOR LIVABILITY

The checklist below can help you decide if your home meets your current and future requirements. Think about your home environment as you review the list. You'll then know if you need to make home updates, or if you should explore other options such as searching for a more suitable home.

### Livable homes have:

- At least one step-free entrance into the home
- A bedroom, full bath, and kitchen on the main level
- Wide doorways and hallways
- Lever door and faucet handles
- Multi-height kitchen countertops that can be used while standing or seated
- Kitchen and bathroom cabinets and shelves that are easy to reach
- A bathtub or shower with a non-slip bottom or floor
- Blocking in the bathroom walls so grab bars can be added as needed
- Well-lit hallways and stairways
- Secure handrails on both side of stairways

### Occupational Therapy Assessments of the Home

If you would like a more complete assessment of your home for livability, enlist the help of an occupational therapist who can evaluate the fit between you and your home environment. Many occupational therapists are specialized in the area of home modifications and can identify strategies for increasing home safety and changing your home to meet your needs, abilities, and lifestyle.

Physicians, case managers, and other medical professionals can refer you to occupational therapists in your area. Other sources for locating occupational therapists who specialize in home modifications include your local homebuilders association as well as colleagues, family members, and friends who have received occupational therapy services.



Jay L. Clendenin/Aurora

## What to Expect

Once an occupational therapy practitioner is included in your personalized home assessment, you can expect a friendly interview to help determine what activities are important in your day and how your current home environment is affecting your daily routines. Part of the interview may include questions about your medical history, family dynamics, hobbies, and what your goals are for the future.

Occupational therapy practitioners are also concerned about any conditions you might have and how they impact your ability to participate in the activities you have discussed together. The interview may therefore include questions such as:

- Are certain activities painful or difficult?
- Is reading or detail work affected by blurry vision or vision loss?
- Are you experiencing balance issues or shortness of breath when climbing the stairs?
- Are you avoiding any activities that you used to do because they are difficult or because you are worried about safety?

You also may be asked to perform specific tasks you do each day, or one you want to do better or more safely. Examples include reaching into a kitchen cabinet or stepping into a bathtub. This individualized approach can help determine what changes to your home environment may be needed to make it safer and more comfortable for you.

Based on the information she gathers during the assessment, the occupational therapist will make recommendations to change your home environment so you can safely, comfortably, and successfully do the things you want to do in and around your home. Possible recommendations might include:

- Ways to adapt your kitchen to reduce the time or effort it takes you to prepare your meals



Vaughan Creative Media

- Options for updating your bathroom so bathing is easier and safer
- Changing the lighting in your home so it is easier to read a recipe or see the stairs at night

For more information, check the Resources section at the back of this booklet.

## HOME SAFETY

Conducting a home safety check can go a long way in helping prevent problems that could lead to a fall, other injury, or loss of independence. Spend some time walking through your home, answering the questions below and reviewing the safety recommendations listed under each question. If you find any problems, take action to correct any hazards and create a safer home environment for you, your family, and visitors.



Chris Usher

### Entrances and Exits

Are exterior pathways, porches and doorways well lit and is the house number clearly visible on the house or mailbox?

- Increase lighting along pathways and entryway.
- Install floodlights with motion sensors.
- Install photoelectric “eyes” in light fixtures so lighting will turn on automatically at dusk.
- Install easy-to-see, reflective house numbers that can be seen from the street.

Are the walkways in good condition?

- Repair any holes, loose bricks, or uneven pavement.
- Make sure the pavement is free of moss or mold, which could make it slippery.

Are there handrails on both sides of the steps?

- Install handrails on both sides of all steps.

Is the door easy to open and do all exterior doors have deadbolts?

- Install lever door handles, which are easier to use than knobs on all doors; and deadbolts on exterior doors.
- For added convenience, place a bench near the exterior door you use most often, to hold packages while you are opening the door.

Does the main entrance door have a security peephole or view panel?

- Install security peepholes at a height right for you on exterior doors.
- Consider exploring electronic options for seeing who is at the door.

Is the door threshold visible or could it contribute to trips or falls?

- Install a beveled, no-step, no-trip threshold. Consider a contrasting color so it will be easily visible.

Are scatter or throw rugs or mats that could cause tripping or slipping near doorways?

- Remove all scatter or throw rugs.

### Steps and Stairways

Are steps and stairways in good repair?

- Consider refinishing or replacing worn stair treads.
- Make sure no nail heads are sticking out.
- On exterior steps, make sure there are no loose bricks or pavers and wooden or concrete steps are in good condition.



Is carpeting on stairs in good condition?

- Replace or remove any worn, torn, or loose carpeting. Choose tightly woven low pile carpet with thin padding and, if patterned, be sure the carpet does not make steps harder to see.
- Add non-slip adhesive strips to uncarpeted stair treads.

Are there secure handrails on both sides of stairways?

- Install handrails on both sides of stairs at a height right for you.
- Tighten any loose handrails.

Is there a light switch located at both the top and bottom of the stairs for the overhead stairway light fixture?

- Install light switches at top and bottom of stairs.

Are the stairs well lit?

- Install a compact fluorescent or the highest wattage light bulb approved for overhead or nearby light fixture that does not produce excessive glare.
- Install night-lights in nearby outlets.

Is there any clutter on the stairs?

- Remove all objects from stairways and keep them clear.

## Bathroom

Are the sink, bathtub and shower faucets easy to use?

- Install easy-to-use lever handles on sink, bathtub, and shower faucets.

Is the bathtub and/or shower floor slippery?

- Use non-skid mats or non-slip strips on bathtub and shower floors.

Do bathmats outside the tub have a rubber backing and lie flat?

- To prevent tripping or slipping on bathroom rugs or mats, use only rubber-backed rugs or mats that stay firmly in place or secure them with double-sided rug tape or rubber carpet mesh.

Is there blocking in the walls for grab bar installation in the bathtub, shower, and toilet areas?

- If the walls have been reinforced with blocking, install grab bars in bathtub and shower and at the toilet at heights specific to your needs.
- When building or remodeling, include blocking in bathroom walls to accommodate possible future installation of grab bars.

Is a low toilet seat making it hard to stand up?

- Install a toilet seat riser or a higher comfort height toilet.

Are there exposed pipes that carry hot water beneath the sink?

- If you sit while using the sink, insulate the pipes underneath the sink so your legs don't touch any pipes that might be carrying hot water.

Is there a handheld or adjustable height showerhead in the shower or tub?

- Install a handheld or adjustable showerhead for easier bathing.

Is the hot water heater set at 120° or lower?

- Set the water heater to 120° to avoid scalding.



Jay L. Clendenin/Aurora

Does the bathroom have good lighting?

- Install a compact fluorescent or highest wattage bulb allowed for fixture that does not cause excessive glare.
- Install night-lights and/or replace the light switch with an illuminated switch that can be seen in the dark.

Are small electrical appliances including hair dryers, curling or flat irons, shavers, etc., plugged in when not in use?

- Unplug all electrical appliances when not in use and never use any electrical appliance near a filled sink or bathtub.



## Kitchen

Is there good lighting over the sink, stove, and countertop work areas?

- Increase task lighting at sink, stove, and work areas and use a compact fluorescent or highest wattage bulb approved for all fixtures.

Are cabinets and drawers easy to open?

- Install easy-to-grasp D-shaped handles on cabinets and drawers.

Are stove or cooktop controls easily reached? Does your hand come close to the flame, electric coils, or heated areas when turning the burners on or off?

- If there are no young children in the house and you are replacing your stove or cooktop, consider purchasing one with controls at the front.
- Add touch and color-contrasted controls for those with low vision.

Is a fire extinguisher within easy reach of the stove or cooktop?

- Mount or place an ABC-rated fire extinguisher in an easy to reach place.

Do you have a sturdy step stool?

- Only use step stools that have non-slip steps and a grip handle and never climb on chairs or countertops.

Are objects on shelves or in drawers easily accessible?

- Install adjustable, pull-down shelving to increase safe access to upper cabinets.
- Install pull-out cabinetry or shelves under counters and Lazy Susans in corner cabinets.

Does the sink have an anti-scald device?

- Install a pressure-balanced, temperature-regulated faucet and keep it at 120° or less.

Is there a countertop work area that can be used while seated?

- Create countertop workspace with knee clearance by installing pull-out cabinetry or by removing cabinet doors and shelves so you can work while seated.

Do you use wax on the floor?

- Avoid using floor wax and don't walk on just cleaned floors until they have completely dried.

### Living Room, Dining Room, and Bedroom

Are all passageways clear and well lit?

- Arrange furniture to allow for clear, wide passageways.
- Make sure the bed is placed for easy access to the bathroom.
- Use natural light to the fullest by opening curtains, blinds, and shades during daylight hours.
- Use compact fluorescent or highest wattage light bulb allowed for lamps and fixtures.



Melanie Roberts

Are any electrical or telephone cords exposed along pathways?

- Place all cords along a wall where they can't cause tripping.
- Remove cords from under furniture or carpeting to prevent fraying and possible fire.

Are rugs or carpets secured to floor? Are there any scatter or throw rugs?

- Use double-sided tape to secure all rugs. Remove all scatter and throw rugs.

Is there ample light in all areas?

- Use compact fluorescent or highest wattage light bulb allowed for lamps and fixtures.
- Use natural light to the fullest by opening curtains, blinds, and shades during daylight hours.

Are there smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor of the house?  
Are they near bedrooms?

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on every floor.
- Make sure alarms can be heard in all bedrooms.

Is the telephone easily accessible?

- Install telephone jack or place cordless phone next to bed or favorite chair to improve accessibility.

Are closets well lit and easy to use?

- Install a closet light and adjustable rods and shelves.

Are light switches easy to use?

- Replace traditional toggle switches with easy-to-use rocker panel switches.
- Install touch control lamps or devices that can automatically turn lights on and off.

### Getting Started

Sometimes it is difficult to know where to begin to create a safer, more comfortable home. The best way is to start simply. Many home updates that greatly increase home comfort and safety can be made at little to no cost. Some of our favorites are included here and most of the products can be purchased at your local hardware or home improvement store.

- Set the hot water heater to 120° to prevent scalding and reduce energy costs.
- Remove clutter from stairways and passageways; place exposed electrical cords along a wall where they can't be tripped over; and always remove all cords from underneath furniture or carpeting.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on all levels of the house, especially outside bedrooms.
- Replace traditional toggle light switches with easy-to-use rocker panel switches. Consider illuminated switches in bathrooms.
- Install lever handles on all doors and faucets.
- Install a hand-held, adjustable height showerhead for easier bathing.
- Replace knobs on cabinets and drawers with easy-to-grip D-shaped handles.

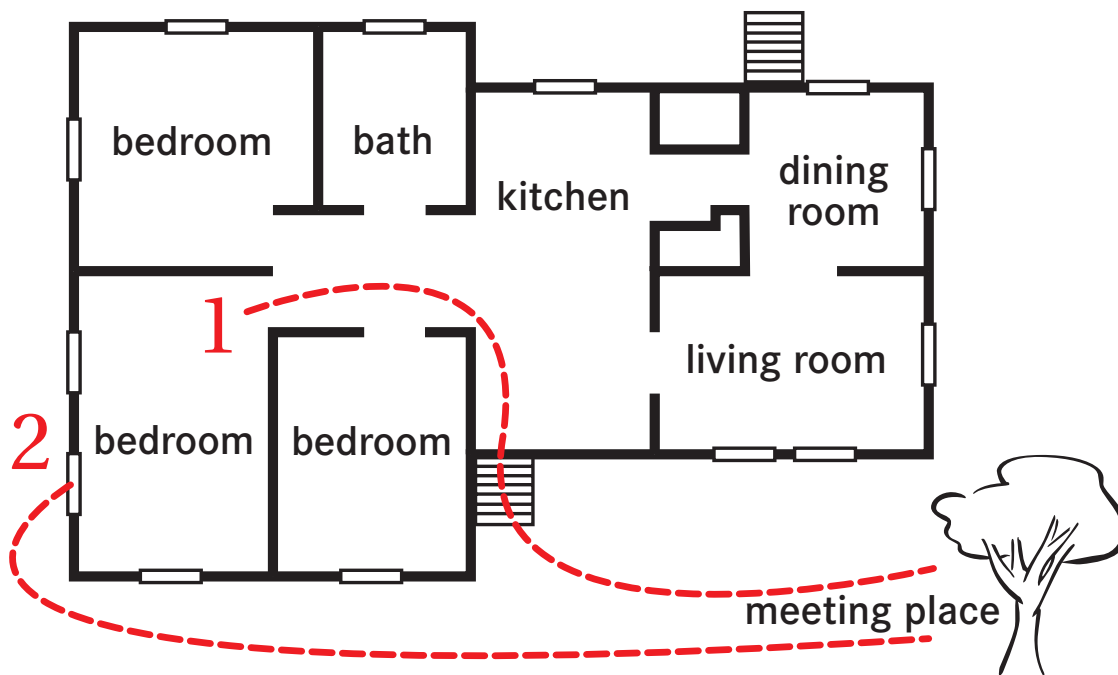
For information and ideas on more no-cost/low-cost home improvements visit [www.aarp.org/homeupdates](http://www.aarp.org/homeupdates).



## Home Emergency Exit Plan

Emergencies, such as fires, can happen quickly and unexpectedly. Whether you live alone or in a house full of people, everyone needs to have an emergency exit plan in place so the home can be evacuated quickly. In developing a home emergency exit plan you should:

- Investigate all possible exits and escape routes and develop a plan for all levels of the home and all bedrooms.
- Know the details of the plan and make sure all family members, including young children, grandchildren, and overnight visitors know it too.
- Select an agreed upon meeting place, such as a neighbor's house, mailbox, streetlight, or other location outside and away from the home where everyone can meet after exiting.
- Practice the home emergency exit plan every six months to make sure everyone can exit quickly and safely.



# HOME MAINTENANCE

## Your Home Is Your Greatest Asset

Proper care of your home will not only protect your investment, it will help you avoid major problems and costly repairs down the road. When it comes to your home, protect it—don't neglect it!

If you don't have the time, skill, or physical endurance to do everything on your list, consider getting help. If you need professional services, ask friends and neighbors for referrals. Get two or three estimates before you hire someone and make sure the person or company is licensed and insured.

## Seasonal Tasks

There are many things you can do throughout the year to prepare your home for each season. Using the checklist below will help you keep your house safe and in top condition all year long.



## Spring

- Clean windows.
- Replace storm windows with screens.
- Change batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.
- Inspect house for fire hazards, such as overloaded extension cords.
- Make sure all exits, hallways, and stairs are free of clutter.
- Clean gutters, yard, driveway, patio, porches, decks, and walkways.
- Clean out garage, shed, or carport.
- Clean basement and attic.
- Clean the clothes dryer's vent system. Lint buildup can cause the dryer to run longer to dry your clothes, using energy needlessly. Lint buildup can also lead to a fire.
- Make sure all indoor and outdoor stairs are slip proof, well lit, and in good condition.
- Fix broken or uneven pavement on stairs, walkways, patios, or driveways.
- Call a professional to inspect the roof for leaks, loose shingles, or debris.
- Check indoors and outside for signs of pests, such as termites or rodents. Call a professional if you suspect any activity.
- Fix broken doors, gates, or fences.

## Summer

- Mow the lawn and trim the bushes, making sure bushes don't obscure windows or doorways.
- Have an arborist remove weak, dead, or rotten trees or branches that could fall on the house.
- Install window air conditioners or have the central air system inspected and tuned.
- Check all door locks and door handles to be sure they're in good working order.
- Install deadbolts on exterior doors if you don't already have them.
- Check the home security system or consider installing one.
- Check door and window screens and repair or replace as needed.
- Check outside lights and replace bulbs as needed.
- Clean outdoor lawn furniture and grill.
- Check garden hoses for leaks and replace as necessary.

## Fall

- Clean and inspect gutters, downspouts, and eaves.
- Weatherize house for winter—including attic and basement—with insulation, weather stripping, and caulk.
- Check and clean furnace and replace air filters.
- Store lawn furniture, hoses, planters, grills, and other outdoor items for winter.
- Buy and store salt, sand, and snow shovel. Have snow blower tuned.
- Drain outdoor water faucets and irrigation pumps.
- Clean the clothes dryer's vent system. Lint buildup can cause the dryer to run longer to dry your clothes, using energy needlessly, and lint buildup in the vent can lead to a fire.
- Create and store an emergency survival kit for bad weather. Include batteries, candles, water, and canned or packaged food that won't spoil.
- Inspect and clean the fireplace and stock up on firewood. Hire a chimney sweep if you haven't had your chimney flue cleaned in a while or if you regularly use your fireplace or wood stove.
- Replace screens with storm windows and remove and clean window air conditioning units.
- Fill oil or propane tanks.
- Keep walkways, pathways, and driveway clear of leaves and debris.
- Change batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

## Winter

- ❑ Keep walkways and driveways clear of snow and ice.
- ❑ Put a blanket, shovel, sand, and first aid kit in your car.
- ❑ Stock up on canned goods and household items, including light bulbs and batteries. Buy compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). They are more energy efficient and will last longer.
- ❑ Check all holiday lights and make sure they are in good working order.
- ❑ Make sure space heaters work properly. Never leave them on unattended. Be sure not to place them close to furniture, curtains or anything flammable.
- ❑ Check sinks, tubs, and toilets for leaks.

## ENERGY CONSERVATION TIPS

### Free and Easy Ways to Cut Your Energy Bill

With energy bills on the rise, everyone is looking for ways to cut back on energy consumption. Here are some easy and free things anyone can do to help cut energy costs:

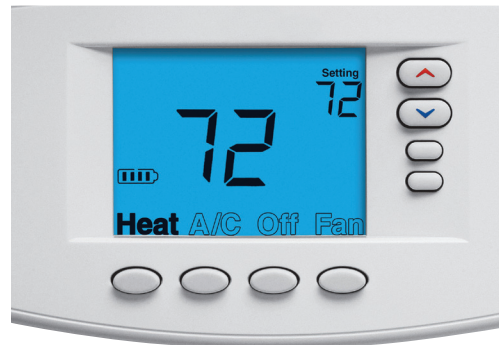
- Open curtains, blinds, or shades on south facing windows in winter and let the sun warm your rooms. In summer, close window coverings on east and west facing windows to keep rooms cool.
- Close the fireplace damper when the fireplace is not in use to prevent heated air from going up the chimney. After burning a fire, be sure all embers are out before closing the damper.
- Remove window air conditioning units when summer is over to prevent heat from escaping. If the unit can't be moved, put a cover over it to prevent drafts.
- Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms, and kitchen and bathroom ventilating fans after they've done their job.
- Take showers instead of baths and set the hot water heater at 120°. You'll use less water and reduce water consumption and heating costs.
- Run clothes and dishwashers only when you have a full load. Use the cold water setting on your clothes washer when possible to reduce water heating costs.
- Clean the lint filter in your clothes dryer after every load and periodically clean the dryer's vent system. Lint buildup in the filter can cause the dryer to run longer, wasting energy. Lint in the vent can lead to a fire.
- Clean vents, registers, baseboard heaters, and radiators regularly for maximum heating or cooling output, and make sure they aren't blocked by curtains, furniture, or carpeting.

- Unplug block-type chargers such as phone, computer, small appliance, and toy chargers from the wall when not in use. If the charger is plugged into the wall, it is still on and consuming energy even if you aren't charging.
- Lower your thermostat at night and sleep under extra blankets or a comforter during cooler months.
- Turn ceiling fans on low and set the blades to force warm air near the ceiling down in the winter. Do the reverse in the summer, making blades turn in the opposite direction so cooled air will be forced up.
- Use heat-generating appliances such as clothes dryers and ovens during the coolest time of day. This reduces the load on your air conditioner in the summer and helps heat the house in the winter.
- Air dry washed dishes and pots and pans instead of using the dishwasher's drying cycle.

### Energy Efficiency Projects That Save You Money

Follow just a few of the tips below to make your home easier to heat and cool, and to save money.

- Install weather stripping or caulk around doors and windows and place foam gaskets behind outlet plate covers on exterior walls. If there is a gap at the bottom of the door, install a door sweep or door shoe gasket.
- Insulate the attic for savings on both heating and cooling costs. Attic insulation is a primary way to maximize heating efficiency.
- Install a programmable thermostat to change the set point for heating and cooling when you are regularly away from home or are asleep.
- Seal and insulate ducts. Ducts running through unfinished spaces, such as attics, crawl spaces, and garages, that are not properly sealed and insulated can waste energy. Seal the joints with a non-hardening sealant and insulate the ducts. Also, seal gaps around pipes that connect to the house from the outside with expanding foam, which comes in convenient aerosol cans.
- Wrap the hot water heater, especially older models that don't have much insulation, with an insulation blanket or jacket made specifically for this purpose. (Note: Blankets aren't recommended for gas heaters and those with automatic vent dampers. Check with the manufacturer to see if your unit can be wrapped.) Reduce your water expenses further by installing low flow showerheads and faucets.



- Install glass doors on the fireplace opening. This can prevent warm air from escaping up the chimney and prevent embers and ash from flying free.
- Remove window air-conditioning units before cold weather to prevent heat from escaping through and around the unit. If the unit can't be removed, put a cover over it to prevent drafts and make sure there are no openings where cold air can seep in.
- Replace or clean furnace air filters once a month or according to the manufacturer's instructions. A clogged, dirty filter blocks air flow forcing the furnace to run longer, raising your energy bill.
- Check heating and air conditioning systems and have a professional clean and tune them once a year.
- Place a heat-resistant reflector between the radiator and the outside wall.
- Replace incandescent light bulbs, especially in high-use areas, with Energy Star® compact fluorescent light bulbs. While they cost more, compact fluorescent bulbs use less energy than incandescent bulbs, last longer, and are better for the environment.
- Install white shades or blinds on windows to reflect heat away from the house if you live in a warm climate.
- Consider installing awnings over west and south-facing windows if the roof overhang doesn't shield windows from direct sunlight. They will block solar heat and also protect furnishings from UV damage.
- Install a motion detector or photocell unit on exterior lights so they will only turn on when needed and will turn off during the day automatically.
- Ask your utility company to do an energy audit. Cost for an audit varies but some companies offer free audits for low-income families.



# GETTING HELP

## Seven Steps to Hiring a Contractor

If the changes you want to make to your home require more than simple do-it-yourself projects, it is important to find the right skilled help. Before hiring a contractor, do your homework and check them out. Here's what you need to do before hiring someone:

### 1. List the things you want to have done.

Before you talk to a contractor, think carefully about the changes you want to make to your home. Write down exactly what you want the contractor to do.

### 2. Get recommendations from family and friends.

Talk with family, friends, and neighbors who have used contractors. Find out if they were satisfied with the work, the price, and the time it took to complete the job. Ask if they would use that contractor again.

Local hardware and home improvement stores can often make recommendations or give you the name of someone they trust and respect.

Beware of the stranger that shows up at your home unannounced and says he can give you a good price because he has leftover materials from another job. This is rarely a good choice and could be a scam.

### 3. Check out the recommendations.

Once you have a list of names, do some research on them. The Better Business Bureau and Consumer Protection Office can help you find out if there have been any complaints filed against a contractor or their company. It is also a good idea to see if the contractor you are interested in is licensed in your state. Although licensing doesn't guarantee reliability, it's a minimum qualification a contractor should have.

### 4. Compare contractors.

Make sure the contractor does the kind of work you are interested in and ask how long they have been in business. Ask for proof that they are licensed, bonded, and covered by workman's compensation and liability insurance. Get references and check them out to make sure they are financially sound.

### 5. Get estimates.

Meet with at least three contractors to discuss the job you want done and your budget. Estimates should detail the materials to be used, the labor charges, the start and end dates, and the total cost.



## **6. Put everything in writing.**

A well-written, clear, and detailed contract is very important. Make sure that everything you agreed to is in writing. Don't approve any plans unless you understand them. Never sign a contract with any blanks in it and get a copy of everything you sign. Take your time to make your hiring decision and remember, genuinely good deals will still be there tomorrow. Get a second opinion before you sign.

## **7. Don't pay the final bill until all work is complete.**

Don't make your final payment until all work is complete and you and any necessary local building authorities have inspected the work. Also, before you pay the final bill, obtain a written statement from the contractor saying he has paid all of the subcontractors and suppliers.

## **Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists (CAPS)**

The National Association of Home Builders in collaboration with AARP and other experts developed the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) program to address the needs of consumers who want to make their house a beautiful home for a lifetime—regardless of one's age or abilities.

A Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist is specially trained in:

- The unique needs of people 50 and over
- Home updates that can help people continue living independently in their homes longer
- Common remodeling projects
- Solutions to common barriers

CAPS professionals have been taught the strategies and techniques for designing and building attractive, barrier-free living environments. The CAPS program goes beyond design to address the codes and standards, common remodeling projects and their costs, product ideas and resources needed to provide comprehensive and practical aging-in-place solutions.

To find a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist professional in your area, go online to [www.aarp.org/caps](http://www.aarp.org/caps).

## **Finding an Occupational Therapist**

Physicians, case managers, and other medical professionals can refer you to occupational therapists in your area. Other sources for locating occupational therapists that specialize in home modifications include your local homebuilders association as well as colleagues, family members, and friends who have received occupational therapy services.



Many occupational therapists who specialize in home modification have obtained specialty certification in environmental modifications (SCEM) through the American Occupational Therapy Association or have the CAPS designation. To find out more about occupational therapists and home modifications, go online to [www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Adults/HomeMods](http://www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Adults/HomeMods).

## RESOURCES

The AARP website, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org), provides information on housing topics at [www.aarp.org/home-garden](http://www.aarp.org/home-garden) and home design and home updates at [www.aarp.org/homedesign](http://www.aarp.org/homedesign). To review and download housing publication resources visit [www.aarp.org/housingresources](http://www.aarp.org/housingresources). To order copies of housing publications go to [www.aarp.org/housingmobilitypubs](http://www.aarp.org/housingmobilitypubs).

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. has tips for living including information on aging-in-place, home modification, falls prevention, and more at [www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Adults.aspx](http://www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Adults.aspx) and podcasts on home safety, home fit and falls prevention, and other topics at [www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Podcasts.aspx](http://www.aota.org/Consumers/consumers/Podcasts.aspx).

The National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modifications provides information and resources on home modification for professionals and consumers. For information and resources visit: [www.homemods.org](http://www.homemods.org).









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[www.aarp.org/home-garden](http://www.aarp.org/home-garden)

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