

# Want to Age in Place? Don't Fall

By Martin Simenc



**For too many of us, the first step to a declining quality of life and a loss of independence is a misstep or fall. Ironically, most of these life changing falls occur within the familiar surroundings of our respective homes.**

The good news is that most falls in and around the home can be prevented by making some minor modifications. These minor modifications typically do not constitute a costly remodel but rather spending a few hundred to a few thousand dollars to make your home safer and more accessible.

## Bathrooms

The most common and arguably most important home modification is a grab bar. Sturdy and well positioned grab bars make bathing a safer and more independent activity. Today, grab bars are available to match every décor and anchoring system advancements enable us to install them wherever they are needed and through virtually every surface.

A multitude of other simple modifications can be made to facilitate safer toileting and bathing. Raising and providing additional support at the toilet can be done tastefully as can adding hand-held showers and other safety features in the shower.

## Bedside

Adjacent to the bed is the second most common location in the home where falls occur. A floor-to-ceiling pole (think dancing pole) provides support and stability when getting in and out of bed. Bedside poles enable seniors to use their upper body strength efficiently to stand and steady themselves before heading off to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

## Stairs

It's no surprise that stairs are the most common location where serious falls occur. Clutter, poor lighting and worn carpeting all contribute to falls. Sturdy and continuous handrails on

both sides of the stairs are a great investment in your independence.

Go with steel railings for most exterior and garage steps and wood railings on the interior. Aesthetics improve with price but even for a few hundred dollars, attractive and supportive railings are readily achievable.

For those with serious mobility limitations requiring use of a walker or wheelchair, wheelchair ramps or motorized lifts may be necessary. Modular ramps are now available for nearly immediate installation as a highly effective solution that need not result in permanent modification of the home. Stair and porch lifts provide access to and within residences at a fraction of the cost associated with relocating and again do not constitute a permanent modification to the residence.

When considering service providers to assist with any of these tasks, be sure to look for credentials. Being a licensed general contractor is an absolute minimum to give you some element of consumer protection. Expertise in making senior home modifications is very helpful. Anyone that is committed to serving seniors will likely have obtained a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) or a Certified Environmental Access Consultant (CEAC) designation.



Providers that have achieved accreditation via an organization such as The Joint Commission are held to the same customer safety standards as hospitals and medical providers.

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