Making Home Safer For Seniors
A guide to living safe and sound at home as you age.

Table of Contents
Introduction 3
References 3
Making sense of senior safety 4
The truth hurts 5
Simple home safety solutions 6
Home safety checklist 8
 Older, wiser, be home-wise 10
Home modification and maintenance support 12
Keeping you safe at home, instead 15
Introduction

We know that 90% of Australian seniors want to remain in the comfort of their own home rather than institutionalized care.

However, it is important that your home is, and remains, a safe, healthy and practical living environment for as long as possible.

This guide provides practical solutions to help you live well at home and safeguard your health and independence by **Making Home Safer for Seniors.**

Resources


Information in this guide is provided by Home Instead Senior Care and its Franchise Owner network as general advice only and should not be interpreted as a recommendation for a specific course of action. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information is correct as of the date of publication. We recommend you seek expert advice from your local Home Instead office or a health professional, about your specific circumstances. **Publication date September 2014.**
Making sense of senior safety

Why is it that safety becomes a greater risk with age?

As we age we can experience a decline in mobility, motor skills and have difficulty with balance.

Our senses can decline (hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch) and we may become forgetful.

SIGHT
By the time we are 60, our pupils decrease to about one-third the size they were at age 20. Adding to that are ageing-related eye conditions such as cataracts and macular degeneration.

TASTE
We start out with about 9,000 taste buds. They decrease in both number and mass with ageing.

SMELL
Our sense of smell can diminish, especially after age 70, as a result of loss of nerve endings and less mucus in the nose.

TOUCH
As we age our motor skills deteriorate and decreased blood flow to our nerve endings can reduce the sense of pain and temperature.

HEARING
Our ears control our hearing and sense of balance, both of which can be compromised as we age.

Changes to our senses can contribute to our risk of accident or injury in and around the home.
The truth hurts

It’s an old adage - accidents happen closest to home - but unfortunately it’s the truth. Slips, trips and falls are the greatest risk to your health, safety and independence at home.

Every year 1 in 3 people aged 65+ and living in their own home, will have a fall. This rate increases with age, with the highest proportion of falls occurring in men and women over the age of 85.

Falls = #1 cause of hospitalised injury for Australians aged 65+. 50% occur at home due to slipping, tripping or stumbling. Falls are also linked to a direct increase in admissions to hospitals and aged care facilities.

Taking a closer look at the kitchen, we found that 5.4 million cases of food borne illnesses occur in Australia every year. Of these, it is estimated that 1 in every 5 occurs from incorrect food handling in the home.

Reports also show that the risk of a burn injury is greater at 60+ than at any other time since childhood, and the average size of the burn is larger than at any other age.

Falls and other accidents are costly and stressful and can jeopardise your lifestyle at home. They are also preventable. This booklet provides some simple solutions to make living at home safer and easier for you.
Simple home safety solutions
We want to live at home but over time, simple day-to-day activities can become more challenging.

**KITCHEN**

- **HANDLES**: Replace cupboard and drawer handles with D-shaped handles. They are easier to use, particularly if you have limited strength or suffer from arthritis.

- **EASY TO REACH**: If your cupboards are too high, too low or too deep – adjustable shelving that swings up, swings down or rolls out can be installed.

**BEDROOM**

- **BED HEIGHT**: The bed is too low if your knees are above the hips when sitting on the bed. Bed raisers under bed legs can raise the height and make it easier to get in and out of every day.

- **PHONE**: Ensure you have easy access to a phone, especially at night. Invest in a cordless phone or keep your mobile phone on charge next to the bed.

- **EMERGENCIES**: A personal emergency alert system is also a good investment, especially if you live alone.

**BATHROOM**

- **GRAB RAILS**: Grab rails provide extra support and assist you to maintain your balance as you move in and around the bathroom.

- **EASY TO USE TAPS**: Install lever or flick mix tap fittings with soft turn washers in place of standard screw on/off taps – they are easier to grasp and use.

- **ADJUSTABLE SHOWER HEAD**: A slide-bar shower head caters for various height adjustments, can be used sitting or standing and is more practical for cleaning.

- **EASY SHOWER ACCESS**: Remove the threshold from your shower, allowing a step-free, walk-in shower access.

- **SHOWER SEAT**: If modifying your shower, consider incorporating a built-in shower seat allowing you safety, comfort and convenience to shower in a seated position if needed.
Make living at home easier with these tips for simple home solutions.

**LIVING**

- **LIGHTING**: There are various additional lighting solutions available such as night lights, rope lighting, battery powered, touch, sound or motion-activated lighting - all of which enhance comfort, convenience and safety in your home. Lighted switch plates make it easy to find the light switch in the dark and also serve as a night light. Multi-way light switching enables you to turn on lights as you enter the room and turn them off as you exit from multiple points.

- **HANDLES**: Install lever handle latches on doors – they are easier to grasp, handle and allow for easier entry and exit.

- **HINGES**: Swing away door hinges widen doorways for easier access, swinging the door completely clear of the opening so that it sits flush against the wall. This is especially helpful if you are using a wheely walker or are in a wheelchair.

- **DOORS**: Retractable weather shields on doors sit flush under the door, won’t catch along the floor on opening and closing the door and prevent drafts during the colder months.

**LAUNDRY**

- **WASHING**: A front loading washer and dryer is easier to use, reach in and out of and can be raised to individual standing height.

**OUTDOORS**

- **GRAB RAILS**: Each major entry point should have at least one sturdy rail for support. Install grab rails to support you getting in and out of the house.

- **SENSOR LIGHTS**: Install a sensor light at your home’s major entry points. It will light your path into the house and is a good security measure to have in place.
Home safety checklist
As we age, so does our home. General wear and tear combined with our changing needs can present a variety of home safety hazards. Use this checklist to identify any risks around your home.

Are floors and surfaces slippery (indoor and outdoor)?
☐ Apply non-slip adhesives or coating to your floors, stairs, driveway and walkways. Add a rubber mat or adhesive non-stick decals to the bottom of your shower or bath.

Do uneven surfaces, rugs create a tripping hazard? Is the carpet torn?
☐ Remove throw rugs and runners or use double-sided tape to secure them to the floor. For small tears, a little glue or carpet staples can fix the problem.

Are grab rails available near the bath, shower and toilet?
☐ Installing grab rails near the shower, bath and toilet can help prevent falls and other accidents as well as avoid damage to existing household fixtures you may currently be using for support. In general, towel rails, shelves and other bathroom fixtures are not weight bearing and should not be used for support.

Is there adequate light?
☐ Increase light wattage to allowable levels and investigate additional lighting options. There are various additional lighting solutions available such as night lights, rope lighting, battery powered, touch, sound or motion-activated lighting – all of which enhance comfort, convenience and safety in your home.

Do you have clear and accessible pathways?
☐ Ensure your pathways are free from obstruction. Rearranging furniture can allow better circulation in, around and out of rooms. Ensure power cords run behind furniture or are well secured. If you use walking aids you may require wider pathways in and around your home.

Is there too much clutter and not enough space?
☐ It might be a good time to clean out cupboards and drawers of items you no longer wear, use or need. Similarly remove unnecessary furniture or invest in more practical storage solutions for your home.
Home Instead Senior Care has developed this simple checklist to help you identify and address potential risk factors and prevent any unwanted accidents or injury.

**Is your furniture steady, comfortable and easy to get in and out of?**
- It might be a good time to update key furniture pieces with more stable, practical items that suit your needs.

**Are cupboards and shelves too high or low?**
- Move items to the shelves that are the easiest to reach and access.

**Is there spoiled food in the refrigerator?**
- The dangers of eating expired or spoiled food can be many including food poisoning. Go through your refrigerator weekly, check expiration dates and bin all out of date foods. Periodically go through your pantry and check the expiration dates of all non-perishable items.

**Do you have access to a telephone, especially at night?**
- Consider changing to a cordless phone or keeping a mobile phone by the bed. Alternatively, install a personal emergency alert system that alerts your family, neighbours or emergency services when triggered.

**Is there a working smoke alarm in place?**
- Install new smoke detector batteries once a year. Pick a date, like a birthday or the change to daylight-savings time, and make sure all smoke detector batteries in the home are replaced at the same time.

**Is your emergency contact information within easy access?**
- A refrigerator is a good place for emergency contact information. Be sure to include mobile, work and landline phone numbers for your next of kin, your GP and a list of all medications you currently take. Pre-program emergency telephone numbers into your phone if it has the capacity to do so.
Older, wiser, be home-wise

You may be getting older, but the best way to retain your health and independence at home is to think and act wisely. Below are Home Instead Senior Care’s top tips for being home-wise.

**DO:**

1. **Take care**
   In the familiarity of our own home we can often become careless. Take care and focus on what you are doing at home to avoid any unnecessary accidents or injuries.

2. **Know your limitations**
   Are your groceries getting heavier to carry? Is your house getting harder to clean? Is your yard difficult to maintain? Take two trips. Clean one room at a time. Ask for help. Pushing your limits could result in an accident or injury.

3. **Remedy hazards**
   Are you worried you might slip on the driveway? Trip on uneven surfaces? Fall in the bathroom? If you are worried, you have identified a potential risk to your safety. Take the lead and remedy any hazards before the hazard harms you.

4. **Keep your health in check**
   - Exercise regularly to strengthen your arms, legs and improve your balance.
   - Have your GP review your medicines - prescription, over-the-counter and supplements - to identify medicines that you should continue to take, those you should stop taking and those that may cause side effects or interactions such as dizziness or drowsiness.
   - Have your eyes and ears checked at least once a year and update your glasses and aids as needed.

5. **Be prepared**
   Do you have emergency contact information within easy access? Is your phone accessible? Do you have an emergency alert system in place? Accidents happen, no matter what our age. Being well prepared will help you manage them as best you can if and when they occur.
6. **Ask for help**

Are you finding it hard to get up the stairs? Are you having difficulty getting in and out of the shower? Are you getting overwhelmed cooking in the kitchen? Are you having difficulty changing bed linen, making the bed, hanging out your washing, vacuuming or mopping the floors?

If you are struggling with tasks at home, speak up and ask for help. A little help and assistance from a Home Instead CAREGiver can make the difference, negating the need to move by keeping you safe and independent in the comfort of your own home.

**DON'T:**

1. **Don’t take unnecessary risks**
   - Avoid leaning on unsteady furniture or fixtures for support. Put proper supports in place.
   - Refrain from moving furniture or heavy items by yourself. Workplace Health and Safety prevents workers from lifting anything above 11kgs – the same rule should apply to you at home.
   - Avoid reaching beyond where you can see. You could fall or something could fall on you.
   - Don’t climb ladders, chairs and other furniture to get to those hard to reach places. Get someone to support you or help you reach them.
   - Make sure you don’t do too many things at once.

2. **Don’t be too proud to ask for help**

Asking for and accepting help is not a sign of weakness. It is a way of communicating with your family and friends that you are self-aware, conscious of your health and safety, and capable of living independently at home with a little bit of assistance.

Home Instead Senior Care can assist you to live at home longer. We provide in-home care and companionship from 2 hours per visit up to 24 hours a day.
Home modification and maintenance support

NATIONALLY
The Australian Government Department of Health publication Don’t Fall for It provides in depth advice on falls prevention in the home.

QUEENSLAND
The Queensland Home Assist Secure Program provides safety related information, referrals and subsidised assistance to eligible clients aged over 60 who are unable to undertake or pay for critical maintenance services without assistance.

NEW SOUTH WALES
In New South Wales, the Home Modification and Maintenance Service (HMMS) provide affordable and cost effective modifications and maintenance work for people who are eligible for the Home and Community Care Program (HACC) or the Community Care Support Program (CCSP).
For more information visit www.nswhmms.org.au/what-services-do-hmms-provide

The Community Care Access Point (CCAP) is a confidential telephone intake, assessment and referral service. It can help you to find out about community care services in the Hunter and Central Coast areas. If you cannot be assessed over the phone, CCAP will make arrangements with Community Options Services who will visit your home and assess your needs in person.
For more information visit www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/individuals/help_at_home/community_care_access_point

VICTORIA
If you are aged over 60, the Victorian Department of Human Services’ Home Renovation Service can help you assess how your home can be maintained and modified to make your life easier and safer. Obtain free, no obligation advice on a variety of home maintenance and modification work. If you are an eligible home owner and need a loan to pay for the works, you can also get financial assistance with a Home Renovation Loan.
For more information visit www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/housing-and-accommodation/home-owner-support/home-modification
**SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

The Metropolitan Equipment Scheme (MES) provides access for older people to a range of basic equipment such as shower chairs, walking frames and other specialised items including wheelchairs. The scheme also provides assistance with home modifications such as the installation of hand rails and steps or in some circumstances more complex modifications.

For more information phone 1300 130 551 or visit www.sa.gov.au/topics/community-support/in-home-care/domiciliary-care/equipment-program/metropolitan-equipment-scheme

The Domiciliary Equipment Service also loans a wide range of equipment and provides home modifications depending on your needs.

For more information visit www.des.domcare.sa.gov.au

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

The Western Australian Home and Community Care Program (HACC) supports older people with minor work in your home or yard as well as minor structural changes to your home to help maintain your independence and safety. HACC conduct an eligibility screening over the phone, followed by an in-home face to face assessment. You will be required to contribute towards the cost of services, dependent on your level of income.

For more information visit www.health.wa.gov.au/hacc/home

**NORTHERN TERRITORY**

The Northern Territory Department of Health can assist individuals on an aged or disability pension living in privately owned homes with subsidies for home modifications under the Disability Equipment Program.

For more information, phone 1800 139 656 or visit www.health.nt.gov.au/Aged_and_Disability/Subsidies/Disability_Equipment_Program_DEP/index.aspx

The Northern Territory Office of Senior Territorians provides information for seniors relating to government and community services that are available in the Northern Territory for seniors.

The Office of Senior Territorians can be contacted on (08) 8999 3894 or emailed at ost@nt.gov.au

**ACT**

The ACT Community Health Intake (CHI) line provides individuals with information and access a wide range of Community Health Services including an Occupational Therapy Service to assess individual needs and coordinate home maintenance and modifications.

For more information, phone the CHI Line on (02) 6207 9977 or visit www.health.act.gov.au/health-services/community-based-health-services
TASMANIA
The Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services operates TasCarepoint – a community access point to a range of Home and Community Care Services including home maintenance and modifications.

For more information, phone 1300 769 699 or visit www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service_information/service_delivery_points/access_point_-_tascarepoint

Fusion Home Modifications and Maintenance Service is available to people who are frail, ageing or disabled. Individuals are required to pay a nominal $10 fee and contribute towards the cost of materials with services and labour costs subsidised by Fusion.

For more information phone Fusion on 1300 788 860

INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTRES
Independent Living Centres Australia (ILCA) provides advice and tips for using assistive technology (anything that assists individuals to carry-out daily activities) in the home through their free advisory service.

For more information on your local ILC, phone 1300 885 886 or visit www.ilcaustralia.org.au

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
Occupational therapists work with people to enhance their ability to engage in activities of everyday life by modifying the occupation or the environment to better support their occupational engagement.

An occupational therapist can help improve your safety and independence at home by assessing and recommending modifications to your home and community environment.

For more information and advice, phone Occupational Therapy Australia on 1300 682 878, email info@otaus.com.au or visit www.otaus.com.au
Keeping you safe at home, instead
Home Instead Senior Care is dedicated to keeping you safe and living independently in your own home as you age.

Home Instead CAREGivers are trained to identify and remedy potential home hazards. Our well trained eyes can identify any potential risks to your safety and provide simple solutions to minimise your risk for slips, trips, falls and other accidents and help you to keep on top of things in and around your home.

HOME INSTEAD CAREGIVERS CAN HELP YOU:

• Identify items for fixing, mending and securing - slippery floors, uneven surfaces, loose railings, unsteady furniture, torn carpet, stiff or rickety doors, cupboards, taps or handles etc.

• Clean, de-clutter and get your home in order, just how you like it.

• Rearrange cupboards so you can access your things easily.

• Get to those ‘hard to reach’ places.

• Do laundry, change bed linen, reach high and low cupboards and shelves.

• In and around the kitchen - things are getting harder to reach and heavier to hold. Avoid slips or burns with a helping hand from our CAREGivers in the kitchen.

• In and around the bathroom - any wet area can be slippery. We can help you in and out of the shower, dry, dress and tidy up afterwards.

Importantly, if something needs fixing, replacing or installing we can coordinate and supervise home maintenance and modification jobs for you.
Home Instead Senior Care is a specialist, national provider of high quality in-home care for older people.

We help with a range of personal and lifestyle needs while providing welcome companionship. Our services include assistance with personal care, light household duties, meal preparation, medication reminders, transport to appointments, shopping and social outings. We take personal responsibility for providing the best in-home care and support to meet our clients’ needs and are committed to addressing the individual and national challenges of Australia’s ageing population.

Established in 1994 in the United States, Home Instead now operates in 17 countries through a network of 1000 offices.

In Australia, Home Instead operates in every mainland State, sharing resources and support across State borders. We employ and train our CAREGivers to understand the challenges facing people as they get older and provide specialised care through our unique training program to support the needs of clients with dementia.

We understand that to you, it’s about finding trustworthy care for your ageing loved one. To us, it’s about providing the highest quality, in-home care services to fit you and your family’s needs. Contact us for a free no-obligation consultation where we can discuss the needs of your loved one and provide you with information and advice to help you and your family find the right care solution. Contact your nearest Home Instead office by visiting www.homeinstead.com.au.