

Home Safety ASSESSMENT

WHAT IS HOME SAFETY EVALUATION?

A home safety evaluation is a structured review of a living environment to identify and address potential hazards especially for older adults, people with disabilities, or those recovering from illness. It typically includes both inside and outside assessments, and focuses on how the individual functions within their space.

A professional, often an occupational therapist, though sometimes physical therapists or certified remodeling specialists, will perform a walkthrough and may ask the resident to demonstrate daily movements (e.g., stepping into the shower, getting out of a chair) to assess real-world risk.

Evaluations typically take around an hour, but complex needs or follow-up sessions can extend this time.

WHY THESE EVALUATIONS ARE IMPORTANT

- **PREVENTING FALLS** - Falling is a leading cause of injury among older adults; one in four over 65 falls annually, with serious injuries occurring in 1 in 5 cases
- **REDUCING OTHER HAZARDS**: Evaluations also identify fire, carbon monoxide, electrical, poisoning or choking risks
- **PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE**: By rearranging spaces, adding assistive devices or changing habits, evaluations help residents live safely and independently
- **SUPPORTING HEALTHCARE & INSURANCE**: Evaluations can be covered by insurance like Medicare, when prescribed by a doctor, especially after falls or hospitalization

Many tools include room-by-room checklists (entryways, stairs, bathrooms, kitchens, hallways, bedrooms, basements, garages, outdoor areas) to systematically identify hazards nia.nih.gov



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Home Safety ASSESSMENT, continued

COMMON HOME HAZARDS & SOLUTIONS

Falls & Mobility

- Remove clutter, rugs, cords
- Install non-slip mats and dual handrails on stairs
- Improve lighting & visibility (switches at both ends of hallways)
- Install grab bars in bathrooms and showers

Fire & Carbon Monoxide Risks

- Ensure smoke & CO2 detectors work
- Inspect electrical cords/outlets
- Keep flammable materials safely stored

Kitchen & Ergonomics

- Place frequently used items at accessible heights
- Use front control appliances
- Add good lighting, room temperature regulation
- Use adaptive handles and anti-scald devices

Entryways & Outdoors

- Ensure smooth, even surfaces and railings
- Trim landscape and fix steps
- Provide lighting for pathways and thresholds

Cognitive & Dementia Needs

- Secure hazardous areas
- Add color cues, clear signage, night lights
- Manage medications, locks, and potential for wandering

Who Conducts & Pays for Evaluations?

- **Providers:** Occupational therapists (ideally certified in aging-in-place), physical
- **Insurance:** Medicare Part B, some Medicare Advantage plans cover evaluations when ordered by a doctor—especially after falls or health changes

BENEFITS OF HOME SAFETY EVALUATION

- Reduced injury risk – Especially from falls and fires
- Improved daily functioning – Better mobility, comfort, confidence
- Cost savings – Potentially avoiding medical or hospital bills
- Independence & peace of mind – Residents and families feel safer and empowered

TO GET STARTED

- Request from your doctor a professional evaluation referral to an Occupational Therapist;
- Check what your insurance covers

Conducting a home safety evaluation is a practical, proactive step toward reducing risks, fostering independence that promotes comfort, confidence and long-term well-being for residents and families alike.

Checklist FOR MODIFICATIONS

BATHROOM

- Install grab bars near toilet and inside shower/tub
- Replace tub with walk-in shower (zero threshold if possible)
- Use a handheld showerhead and adjustable-height fixtures
- Add a shower seat or bench
- Use non-slip mats or strips inside and outside the shower
- Raise toilet height or use a raised seat attachment
- Improve lighting with bright, shadow-free fixtures
- Use lever or hands-free faucets

BEDROOM

- Ensure bed height allows easy access (not too low or high)
- Adjustable bed is easier to get in and out of
- Install nightlights or motion-sensor lights for nighttime safety
- Use a bedside table with rounded corners and accessible storage
- Keep a phone or emergency alert device within reach
- Eliminate clutter and create wide walkways around the bed

LIGHTING

- Use brighter bulbs in frequently used rooms
- Add task lighting for reading, cooking, hobbies
- Install motion-activated lights in hallways and bathrooms
- Avoid glare by using diffused, layered lighting
- Place easy-access light switches at entrances and bed level where possible

FLOORING/RUGS

- Remove or secure area rugs to prevent slipping
- Replace thick carpeting with low-pile or hard surfaces (wheel chairs & walkers easier)
- Avoid thresholds higher than ½ inch between rooms
- Use non-slip mats under all rugs
- Repair or replace uneven flooring

KITCHEN

- Store frequently used items within easy reach (waist to shoulder height)
- Use D-shaped handles on cabinets and drawers
- Consider pull-out shelves or lazy Susans for easier access
- Add lever-style faucet handles for easier use
- Ensure adequate lighting on all countertops and stovetops
- Use appliances with easy-to-read controls and automatic shut-offs

FURNITURE

- Use chairs and sofas with sturdy armrests and firm cushions
- Choose stable furniture that won't tip or slide
- Remove low or unstable coffee tables and side tables
- Arrange furniture to allow wide, clear walking paths
- Avoid sharp edges—use corner guards if needed



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