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Home Safety Tips for Older Adults

by Melinda Nygren Pierce, M.S., P.T. Director of Rehabilitation Services, Presbyterian Homes, Evanston, Illinois

The word “home” conjures up feelings of security, familiarity and comfort. But the safety implied here depends on our interactions with the environment itself. We rely on sensory cues of vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch to give us information about our surroundings.

When sensory changes occur over a lifetime, home may become less safe and secure. Postural changes, stiffness and decreased gradual mobility further limit one’s ability to function. How can independent living be maximized in the face of these changes? How can your home become a safe place once more?

Two strategies for dealing with safety in your home are to add cues to promote and support existing functional abilities, and to adapt the environment to meet your needs. Cues might include the following: Mark steps with a vertical line of tape, creating a visual cue of depth. In contrast, patterned floors create confusing cues and should be avoided.

Smoke alarms, doorbells and clocks that sound in a lower pitch range are needed for those with hearing loss in high-pitched ranges. Remember to adjust treble settings down and bass settings up on televisions and radios, as well.

Thermal sensitivity may be impaired with age-related circulatory changes. A good precaution is to limit water temperatures to 110 degrees.

Use light bulbs that are two to three times stronger than usual, especially on stairs and paths to the bathroom and bedroom. Older adults need two to three times as much light as young individuals.

Attention to the following home adaptations can also improve safety: Add sturdy railings at entrance steps and interior stairs. Remove throw rugs and tack down loose carpeting. Clear walking paths of electrical cords and telephone lines and arrange furniture so that electrical outlets, telephones and wall switches are accessible.

Chairs should be sturdy and have arms for ease of rising. Deep, soft furniture is difficult to get in and out of. Add grab bars and adhesive floor strips to showers and tubs. Grab bars and a raised seat will improve toilet transfers.

A focus on your environment, in the face of physical changes of aging, can help you improve home safety. By capitalizing on abilities and adapting your surroundings, your home can become a safe place once more.

For more information, please contact Presbyterian Homes: 3200 Grant Street, Evanston, Illinois 60201, Phone: (800) 896-9095.

