

15 Things Around the House That Get Harder as We Age

A house rarely stops working all at once. It stops working one small task at a time: a stiff lock, a dark hallway, a shutoff valve you can no longer reach. This free checklist helps you spot those tasks early, while the fixes are still small.

From Michael Stoler, third-generation builder

How to use this checklist

Walk through your house once in daylight and once after dark. Try each task the way you really do it, including with your hands full. Check the box for anything that is already a struggle or is starting to get harder.

Sharing this with a parent? Walk through it together. It's an easier conversation with a list in hand.

Getting in and out

ITEMS 1-4

☐ 1. Front steps with a railing on one side, or none.

Steps are where a missed footing turns into a fall.

Easy fix: a sturdy railing on both sides, so your stronger hand has one going up and coming down.

☐ 2. Round doorknobs and stiff locks.

A knob takes a firm grip and a twist, which gets harder with sore hands or full arms.

Easy fix: lever handles, and a keypad deadbolt so there's no key to fumble.

☐ 3. A dark path and a dark keyhole.

Step edges and uneven pavers disappear at night.

Easy fix: motion-sensor lights along the walk and a light aimed at the door lock.

☐ 4. Rolling the trash cans to the curb.

A heavy can on a sloped driveway, in rain or ice, is a weekly risk.

Easy fix: smaller cans, and ask your trash hauler whether it offers pickup help for seniors.

Moving through the house

ITEMS 5-7

☐ 5. Stairs you climb every day.

A bedroom, bathroom or laundry on another floor means stairs several times a day.

Easy fix: a second handrail, and a light switch at both the top and the bottom. **Plan for later:** main-floor living, or a stair lift or home elevator. Before any lift dealer visits, see the free planning checklist at homesweetfreedom.com.

☐ 6. Walking into a dark room to find the switch.

Especially the trip from bed to bathroom at night.

Easy fix: plug-in motion night lights along that path, and lighted switches by every door.

☐ 7. Throw rugs, raised thresholds and slick floors.

These are classic trip spots, more so with a cane or walker.

Easy fix: remove or secure throw rugs, and have raised thresholds lowered or beveled.

The bathroom

ITEMS 8-10

☐ 8. Stepping over the tub wall to shower.

Lifting one leg over a tub onto a wet surface is one of the riskiest moves in the house.

Easy fix: a grab bar just outside the tub and one just inside the enclosure, so you have something solid to hold the whole way in and out. Tubs with sliding doors leave too little room for a bench, which is why the bars come first. If your tub has a curtain instead, a tub transfer bench lets you sit outside and swing your legs over. **Plan for later:** replacing the tub with a walk-in or curbless shower.

☐ 9. A toilet that sits low.

"Comfort height" toilets sit closer to chair height, roughly 17 to 19 inches, and are easier to get up from.

Easy fix: a comfort-height toilet, or a raised seat with arms.

☐ 10. Grabbing the towel bar for balance.

Towel bars aren't built to hold a person's weight and can pull right out of the wall.

Easy fix: real grab bars by the toilet and in the shower, anchored into studs, solid wood backing, or anchors rated for grab bars.

Kitchen and laundry

ITEMS 11-12

☐ 11. Top shelves, deep corners and the step stool.

Climbing a stool for a dish, or kneeling into a low corner cabinet, is an everyday risk.

Easy fix: move everyday items to between waist and shoulder height, and add pull-out shelves to low cabinets.

☐ 12. Laundry in the basement.

Carrying a full basket down the stairs means you can't hold the railing or see your feet.

Easy fix: a laundry bag you can toss down first, and smaller loads. **Plan for later:** moving the washer and dryer to the main floor.

The house's hidden controls

ITEMS 13–15

Nobody thinks about these until a pipe bursts or an alarm chirps at 2 a.m.

☐ 13. The main water shutoff.

Do you know where it is, can you get to it, and can you turn it? Older valves are often tucked away and stuck tight.

Easy fix: clear a path to it, and have a plumber swap a stiff round-handle valve for a quarter-turn lever valve.

☐ 14. Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on high ceilings.

Changing batteries means climbing a ladder.

Easy fix: alarms with sealed 10-year batteries, so there's nothing to change.

☐ 15. The furnace filter and the breaker panel.

Both tend to live in a basement, closet or attic that's hard to reach.

Easy fix: label every breaker clearly, keep the path to both clear, and put the furnace on a yearly service plan.

What to do with your list

COUNT YOUR CHECKS

0 to 3

Your house is in good shape. Keep this list and walk through it again once a year.

4 to 8

Most of these have low-cost fixes. Start with the front steps, the stairs and the bathroom.

9 or more

It's time for a whole-house plan, so you fix things in the right order and budget for the bigger projects.

WANT THE WHOLE-HOUSE PLAN? IT'S READY NOW.

The Stay-at-Home Plan is a room-by-room guide that turns your checks into a priority list, a budget and the right questions for contractors. \$37 at stayathomeplan.com.

See the free bonus offer on the last page.

The Stay-at-Home Plan

Here's a page from the full guide. Every room works the same way: what to check, why it matters, and the fix.

From Chapter 4: The bathroom · items 1 to 3 of 15

☐ 1 Getting into the tub or shower means stepping over a tub wall or a high curb.

WHY IT MATTERS Lifting one leg over a tub wall onto a wet surface is one of the riskiest moves in any house.

FIX NOW A grab bar just outside the tub and one just inside the enclosure, so there's something solid the whole way in and out. For a tub with a curtain, a tub transfer bench lets you sit outside and slide across; tubs with sliding glass doors leave too little room for one, which is why the grab bars come first.

PLAN FOR LATER A walk-in or curbless shower.

☐ 2 There's nothing solid to hold while getting in, out or turning around in the shower.

FIX NOW Real grab bars, screwed into studs, solid wood blocking, or anchors rated for grab bars. Suction-cup bars aren't safe to put your weight on. Shower grab bars belong 33 to 36 inches above the floor.¹

☐ 3 You grab the towel bar, soap dish or sink edge for balance.

WHY IT MATTERS Towel bars aren't built to hold a person's weight and can pull right out of the wall.

FIX NOW Replace the ones people grab with real grab bars; some grab bars double as towel bars.

...and 12 more in the bathroom alone.

What's in the full guide

- **90 things to check** across 8 areas of the house, each with the fix
- What each fix roughly costs, and who does it: you, a handyman or a contractor
- The questions to ask before you hire, and how to find a contractor trained in aging-in-place work
- Ways to help pay for it: VA, USDA, Medicaid and local programs
- Fill-in pages: your priority list, budget and a map of your house's hidden controls

NEXT PAGE: A FREE BONUS OFFER

The full guide is ready now, plus a free bonus: The Home Lift Planning Guide



THE FULL GUIDE

Ready for the rest of the plan?

The checklist covers 15 things. The Stay-at-Home Plan walks you through every room in the house: what to check, the fix for each problem, who does it, what it roughly costs, and the questions to ask before you hire.



The Stay-at-Home Plan

- 12 chapters, room by room, with a checklist for each
- Cost tables and charts, with who does each job
- Questions to ask before you hire, and how to find the right contractor
- Help paying for it: VA, USDA, Medicaid and local programs
- Fill-in pages: priority list, budget sheet, hidden controls map

\$37

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