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# Aging Safely at Home: What You Need to Know

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*This article is sponsored by [National Lutheran Communities & Services](http://www.nationallutheran.org/)*  
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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines aging in place as “the ability to live in one’s own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income or ability level.” Many seniors choose to age in place so they can remain where they feel most comfortable.

## **Updates to the Home**

One of the major items to take into account when considering aging in place or helping a loved one do so, is whether or not the home is conducive to aging in place. According to AARP, only 1% of homes are actually conducive to aging in place. Updates to homes can be simple or very complex. Some simple recommended updates include:

- Risers for toilet seats
- Grab bars for the bathroom near the toilet and shower
- Hand-held shower head
- Bath bench
- Walk-in bath or shower
- Adequate lighting throughout the home
- Medicine organizer
- Touch-tone telephones with large numbers
- Appliances with automatic shut-off capabilities
- Stair lifts for multi-story homes
- A list of who to call in case of an emergency kept near the telephone

To hire a reputable contractor, seniors and their families can find Certified Aging in Place Specialists through the National Home Builders Association.

## **Avoiding Falls**

At National Lutheran Communities & Services, a major concern of seniors aging at home is the risk of falling. According to the National Council on Aging, one in three older adults fall every year. Falls are the leading cause of both fatal and non-fatal injuries in seniors.

Tripping. Poor balance, medicine or alcohol, sickness, and poor lighting combined with bad vision are just some of the common reasons for falls. Seniors can help avoid falling by taking these simple steps:

- Either discard throw rugs, or ensure they are non-skid rugs
- Remove hazards such as clutter, cords and ensure there is a clear pathway between bedrooms and bathrooms
- Improve lighting in dark areas and keep flashlights around the home to use in the event of an emergency
- Wear sensible, well-fitting shoes
- Use canes, walkers and wheelchairs as needed. Make sure to maintain all assistive devices to ensure they are in good working order
- Organize all essential items for daily use to ensure they are easily reachable. Belongings should be stored at eye level or lower, reducing the reliance on stools
- Explore the latest in security and assistive technologies that can help maintain optimal quality of life
- Exercise regularly to increase strength and improve balance

In the event of a fall, call 911. Sometimes there are injuries that cannot be seen and it is best a medical professional has the opportunity to evaluate the situation. Be sure to share any fall history with the doctor, physical therapist or nurse so they can assist in preventing another.

Even if a loved one decides to age at home, there are resources available to preserve independence and safety. Every state has a variety of organizations that offer both home care services and home health services. Home care services are non-clinical offerings designed to help seniors who want to stay in their home but need some assistance with activities of daily living. Home health care is medical care, which must be prescribed by a physician. The care is delivered by a registered nurse, occupational therapist, physical therapist or other skilled medical professionals.

In Maryland, myPotential at Home—A National Lutheran Service offers home care services in Montgomery County; and in Virginia, provides home care and home health services in Winchester city, Frederick Country, Clarke County and Warren County.

### **Signs Your Loved One Needs Assistance at Home**

If you have a loved one who is living on their own, there are signs to watch for to know if they need some extra help around the house.

Keep an eye on changes in physical function or mental status. Notable concerns include:

- Poor diet or weight loss
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Changes in mood or extreme mood swings
- Difficulty with walking, balance and mobility
- Unexplained bruising or injuries
- Forgetfulness
- Consistent use of poor judgement.

It is also helpful to note changes in personal hygiene. These include:

- Unpleasant body odor
- Infrequent showering or bathing, or a noticeable decline in grooming habits, such as a lack of oral care or wearing dirty clothes.

Finally, it is helpful to look for neglected household responsibilities. This can include:

- Little or no fresh food in the fridge
- A dirty house
- Laundry that is piling up
- Utilities being turned off due to missed payments
- Unexplained dents and scratches on cars.

If any of these signs are present, your loved one can continue to age in place with the help of an in-home care organization, such as myPotential at Home.

National Lutheran Communities & Services believes that every aging individual has the right to choose how he or she would like to age, and doing it in the comfort of their home is a viable option. For more options and resources concerning aging loved ones, visit [www.nationallutheran.org](http://www.nationallutheran.org) (<http://www.nationallutheran.org>). To learn more about in-home services, visit [www.mypotentialathome.com](http://www.mypotentialathome.com) (<http://www.mypotentialathome.com>).

*myPotential at Home in Maryland is licensed as a residential service agency by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Health Care Quality, license number R4007P.*

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