

Practical Home Adaptations Fact Sheet



Property Adaptations

Property adaptations can be beneficial on several grounds. On the one hand, they can make everyday home life easier in general and on the other hand they have the potential to prevent falls.

Over a third of over 65s fall every year and the figure rises to 45% of those over 80 years old. Falls are one of the leading causes of death, injury and hospital admissions amongst the older population.

Many of these falls happen in the home and there is a strong body of evidence pointing to the fact that many are avoidable if a few home adaptations and changes in layout are implemented. Many of the changes are not necessarily costly.

A number of property adaptations that may be worth considering include:

Entrances

1. Install handrails leading up to the property.
2. Install a slope instead of steps leading up to doors to allow easier walking and allow wheel chair access.
3. A key safe can be very useful if an older person goes out and find that they have not taken a key as long as someone nearby has the security code (perhaps a trusted neighbour).

Bathroom

Around half the requests to Social Services for home adaptations are for bathrooms, highlighting the fact that bathrooms can make a real difference. Here are a few things worth considering in the bathroom:

1. Install safety bars, grab bars or handrails in the toilet, shower or bath.
2. Install a shower chair to help in the shower, or when getting in or out of the bath.
3. Better still, install a level access shower / wet-room for ease of access.
4. An anti-slip mat on the floor in the bathroom, bath or shower is a simple, but effective addition to the home.
5. Make getting on and off the toilet easier by using a stool riser seat.
6. Install lever taps and spatula handles on toilets if hands and wrists are particularly affected by arthritis.
7. Consider installing a downstairs toilet if possible as it avoids the need to walk upstairs as often.
8. Keep everything needed on a daily basis within easy reach and in accessible bottles e.g. toiletries in pump action containers on waist height open storage racks and shelves, rather than screw top bottles put away in low cupboards.

Kitchen

1. Install a level induction hob so that pans can be slid across to worktops to avoid lifting them.
2. Install an eye-level oven to avoid bending and lifting.
3. Install drawers which slide out, rather than cupboards with fixed shelves.

4. Install lever taps.
5. Consider visible storage (reducing the need to remember where everything is).
6. Clear worktops of everything except frequently used items and cluster these e.g. place the kettle, tea/coffee/sugar/mugs so that it is easier to make a hot drink with limited movement around the room.
7. Check out the range of specially designed kitchen items that are widely available e.g. electric tin openers if arthritis in the hands / wrists is an issue.



Bedroom

1. Easy access storage is important. Glide action, sliding door wardrobes and cupboards help if hand strength is declining.
2. Regularly used items placed at an easy to reach height reduce the need to stretch and bend.
3. Try touch-sensitive lamps – these are activated by simply touching any part of the lamp base.

Hallway and stairs

Many falls happen on steps and stairs. These can be minimised through:

1. Make sure stairs are sturdy with strong hand railings. Think about installing at least one stairway handrail extending beyond the first and last steps.
2. Consider installing a second banister rail if possible for extra stability.
3. Clearly mark the edges of steps and stairs.
4. Look into the option of installing a stair lift to ease getting up and down stairs.
5. Make sure rugs, including those on stairs, are tacked to the floor and remove loose throw rugs.
6. Recover slippery tiled or laminated floor coverings.
7. Consider using cushioned fall mats - used to soften falls and prevent injury in areas with hard floors. They are available in various sizes 1-inch or 2-inches thick with bevelled edges.

Light and electrics

1. Ensure rooms and stairwells are well lit. Replace bulbs to make the lighting brighter to aid vision, if you need to, or install motion-sensitive lighting that comes on when you enter a room. Use night lights in every home.
2. Look at the position of light switches and plug sockets. Consider lowering light switches and raising sockets. The latter is especially useful as it avoids the need for stretching and bending down behind furniture.
3. Install additional base plugs to remove the need for trailing electrical cords across the floor.
4. Keep the water heater thermostat set at 50 degrees C / 120 degrees F, or lower, to avoid scalding and burns.
5. Try touch-sensitive lamps – these are activated by simply touching any part of the lamp base.
6. Consider installing ‘motion-sensitive’ lights which come on when you walk past them. Lights with movement sensors can be fitted to switch on when you get out of bed or if a person enters a room.
7. Remote controlled lighting can also be useful.

Heating

1. Living in a cold home increases the risk of a stroke, so an efficient central heating system (and using it) is important.
2. Maintain a higher background level of warmth throughout all of the parts of the home that are used to prevent major fluctuations in temperature - moving out of a warm, well heated living room into a cold hall, kitchen or bedroom can be particularly risky for people with circulatory problems.
3. Sitting by a fixed heat source (eg a gas or electric fire) is often a preferred option but consider using fire guards.
4. Isolation valves can be fitted to gas fires and gas cookers if somebody with dementia or cognitive impairment lives alone.
5. Timers and thermostats to control the temperature of hot water are good for avoiding the risk of scalding if somebody has poor judgement over temperature levels.

General

1. Avoid clutter. Remove any furniture that is not needed. All remaining furniture should be stable and without sharp corners, to reduce the chance in injuries, should someone fall.
2. Change the position of furniture, so that older people can hold on to something as you move around the house.
3. Keep the items you use most in easy-to-reach places.
4. Install fire and carbon monoxide alarms.

How to find tradesmen

Many of the adaptations mentioned can be done easily without using tradesmen. However, for jobs where tradesmen are needed, it's advisable to be careful in choosing them. Checkatrade is a good place to start your search.