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# service in ACTION

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Safe, comfortable housing  
for the elderly<sup>1</sup>

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## Quick Facts

The basic need for housing is protection from the elements and intruders.

Front and back doors should have strong dead bolt locks.

Post emergency numbers and your address by each telephone.

Set the thermostat of the water heater at 120 degrees F or lower to prevent accidental scalding.

As a reminder to keep the smoke alarm working, change the batteries on your birthday.

Keep a lamp or flashlight and telephone within reach of your bed.

Make sure handrails are sturdy and securely fastened.

## Shelter/Protection

One must feel safe and secure in order to be able to relax, so be security conscious. Front and back doors should have strong dead bolt locks. If your situation allows, install a burglar alarm system. A "peephole" for all your outside doors is a good idea so you can see who is at the door before you open it. The peephole should be installed at the proper height for you. The peephole should also allow you to see a range of 180 degrees from side to side.

## Comfort/Self-expression

Not only should your home offer physical comfort, but it should provide emotional comfort as well. Surround yourself with things you like. These could be items from the past. Retrieve mementos from attics and old trunks that stir pleasant memories. There are many suitable places in today's world for objects and pictures from the

## Introduction

Our homes fulfill many needs for us. Often, the most basic need is for housing to protect us from the elements and intruders. Once we are warm and secure, other needs arise. Comfort and a place for self-expression is vital for our well-being. Home gives a feeling of independence. Our home should also be a place that is safe from accidents and injuries.

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past.

## Safety

Home accidents are a major source of injuries and can cause death. The elderly are especially vulnerable to serious injuries from home accidents. Older bones are often less dense and more brittle, causing them to break more easily. A simple fall can become a serious, disabling injury that limits independence.

As we age, our senses of sight, touch, hearing, and smell tend to decline. Our physical abilities are reduced, making it more difficult for us to perform certain tasks such as stretching, lifting, and bending. In addition to these declines, we also experience a slowing of judgment and reaction time. As a result, we cannot respond as quickly as when we were younger. These normal changes in perception, physical abilities, and judgment make us more prone to accidents. Taking simple precautions and making adjustments in our home can help insure a safe, accident-free home.

On the following pages, you will find a series of checklists. Use the lists as you go through your home. Make a check mark next to those items or behaviors that you have. If there are some items that you do not check, then your home is not as safe as it could be. By improving those items not marked, you can make your home a safer and more comfortable place to live.

### General Safety

- Emergency numbers and your address are posted by each telephone.
- Telephone can be reached from the floor.
- Inside and outside door handles and locks are easily operated.
- Lever-action door handles are used instead of round knobs.
- Door thresholds are removed or are low and beveled.
- Windows are easily opened from the inside, but have a secure locking system that can prevent someone from entering from the outside.

- The thermostat of the water heater is set at 120 degrees F or lower to prevent accidental scalding.
- Medications are stored in a safe place according to instructions on the label of the package or container.
- Carpeting and rugs are not worn or torn.
- Small, loose rugs have non-skid backing and are not placed in traffic areas of the home.
- Appliances, lamps and cords are clean and in good condition.
- There are no exposed bulbs in lamps or fixtures that can cause glare.
- All electrical equipment bears the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label.
- Enough outlets are located where they are needed in every room.
- Electrical overload protection is provided by circuit breakers, fuses or ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI).
- If the house contains do-it-yourself wiring, the wiring has been checked for safety. (A municipal electrical inspector or an electrical contractor can do this for you.)
- Electrical service has enough capacity to serve the house. (It is up to code. You can call your municipal electrical inspector to have the wiring in your house checked.)
- Extension cords do not carry more than their proper load as indicated on the cord or appliance.
- Electrical cords are placed out of the flow of traffic and out from underneath rugs and furniture.
- Smoke alarms are present in the home and are in working order. One idea to help you remember to change the batteries is to replace them on your birthday.

**Kitchen**

- \_\_\_ The range and sink areas are well lighted.
- \_\_\_ If you have a gas range, it is equipped with pilot lights and an automatic cut-off in the event of flame failure. (Your local utility service representative can check this for you.)
- \_\_\_ The range is not located under a window with curtains which might fall onto a burner.
- \_\_\_ If you have an exhaust hood for the oven, it is provided with easily removable filters for proper cleaning.
- \_\_\_ The kitchen exhaust system is internally vented, discharges directly outside, or discharges through ducts to the outside and not into the attic or other unused space.
- \_\_\_ Countertop space and height is ample to keep carrying and lifting to a minimum.
- \_\_\_ Kitchen wall cabinets are not too high to be easily reached.
- \_\_\_ Lighting of counter tops is enough for meal preparation.
- \_\_\_ The light switch is located near the door.
- \_\_\_ Shiny or glaring work surfaces are not used.
- \_\_\_ Oven controls are clearly marked and easily grasped.
- \_\_\_ Oven controls are located on the front or side of the oven.
- \_\_\_ A single-lever mixing faucet is used.
- \_\_\_ Flooring is safe and non-slip.
- \_\_\_ When cooking, you turn pan handles away from other burners and the edge of the range.
- \_\_\_ When cooking, you avoid wearing garments with long, loose sleeves.
- \_\_\_ Hot pads and pan holders are kept near the range.
- \_\_\_ The exhaust fan is turned on when using the range.
- \_\_\_ If you have a microwave oven, operate it only

when there is food in it. Use potholders to avoid burns.

- \_\_\_ Small appliances are unplugged when not in use.
- \_\_\_ Knives are kept in a knife rack or drawer.
- \_\_\_ Counter tops and work areas are cleared of all unnecessary objects.
- \_\_\_ Drawers and cupboards are kept closed.
- \_\_\_ A stepladder or step-stool is used rather than a chair to reach objects in overhead cabinets.
- \_\_\_ Grease or liquid spills are wiped up at once.

**Stairways and Halls**

- \_\_\_ Steps are in good condition and are free of objects.
- \_\_\_ Steps have non-skid strips or the carpeting on them is securely fastened and free of fraying or holes.
- \_\_\_ Smoke detectors are in place in hallways and near sleeping area.
- \_\_\_ Hallways and bathrooms are equipped with night-lights.
- \_\_\_ Sturdy handrails are on both sides of stairway and are securely fastened.
- \_\_\_ Light switches are located at the top and bottom of stairways and at both ends of long hallways.
- \_\_\_ Inside doors do not swing out over stair steps.
- \_\_\_ There is enough overhead space in the stairway to avoid bumping your head.
- \_\_\_ Room entrances do not have raised door thresholds.
- \_\_\_ It is easy to see the leading edge or nosing of each stair tread while walking down stairs.
- \_\_\_ Stairways and hallways are well lighted.

## Living Room

- \_\_\_ Electrical cords are placed along walls (not under rugs) and away from traffic areas.
- \_\_\_ Chairs and couches are sturdy and secure.
- \_\_\_ Chairs and couches are not too low or too deep to get in and out of easily.
- \_\_\_ Chairs and couches have full arms to aid in sitting or rising.
- \_\_\_ The light switch is located near the door.
- \_\_\_ There is enough space to walk through the room, leaving clear passage ways for traffic.
- \_\_\_ Furniture that might be used for support when walking or rising is steady and does not tilt.

## Bathroom

- \_\_\_ The bathtub or shower has non-skid mat or strips on the standing area.
- \_\_\_ Bathtub or shower doors are glazed with safety glass or plastic.
- \_\_\_ Grab bars are installed on the walls by the bathtub and toilet.
- \_\_\_ The towel bars and the soap dish in the shower stall are made of durable materials and are firmly installed.
- \_\_\_ A single-lever mixing faucet is used, or you have faucet handles that are easy to grasp.
- \_\_\_ Bathroom flooring is matte-finished, textured tile, or low pile commercial carpet (not throw rugs or bathmats).
- \_\_\_ Bathroom has even lighting without glare.
- \_\_\_ The light switch is located near the door.
- \_\_\_ The bathroom door opens outward.
- \_\_\_ The bathroom has a safe supplemental heat source and ventilation system.
- \_\_\_ The outlets are ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) that protect against electric shock.

## Bedroom

- \_\_\_ A lamp or flashlight is kept within reach of your bed.
- \_\_\_ A night light is used to brighten the way to the bathroom at night.
- \_\_\_ Plenty of room is left for you to walk around the bed.
- \_\_\_ You have an adequate-sized nightstand or small table for the telephone, glasses or other important items.
- \_\_\_ There is a sturdy chair with arms where you can sit to dress.
- \_\_\_ Wall-to-wall low pile carpeting or a smooth surface floor covering is installed.
- \_\_\_ You use a bedroom on the first floor of the home.
- \_\_\_ A telephone jack is installed in the room.

## Outdoor Area

- \_\_\_ Steps and walkways are in good condition.
- \_\_\_ Handrails are sturdy and securely fastened.
- \_\_\_ Doorways, steps, porches and walkways have good lighting.
- \_\_\_ Porches, balconies, terraces, window wells and other heights or depressions are protected by railings, closed with banisters, closed with fences, closed with accordion gates, or are otherwise protected.
- \_\_\_ Hedges, trees, or shrubs do not hide the view of the street from the driveway.
- \_\_\_ Garage doors are easy for you to operate, even when snow is piled against them.
- \_\_\_ The garage is adequately ventilated.

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