



## Safety in and around the home

The majority of falls occur in and around the home. Most falls occur in the bedroom, garden and living or family areas as a result of tripping or slipping due to lighting and structural hazards.

While health and lifestyle issues are important to reduce your falls risk, it is also important to minimise any falls risk factors in your everyday surroundings.

This section will help you identify common hazards in and around your home so they can be minimised or modified. Many changes can be made during renovations or when planning and building a new home.

When addressing these hazards, make sure any work is done safely using correct equipment, such as a stable ladder, and with someone nearby to help. You may be eligible for assistance with home maintenance and modifications. Further information on Home Assist Secure is provided on page 38.



### Inside the home

Identify, remove or modify hazards in and around your home.





## Bedroom

More than 60 percent of falls happen in the bedroom. The main hazards are getting in and out of bed, insufficient lighting and tripping over cords, bedspreads or clutter on the floor.

Getting in and out of bed is made safer by having a bed that is the right height for you and a mattress that is firm enough to support you getting on or off it.

A safe way to get out of bed is to first roll on to your side and then sit up before you stand up. If you feel dizzy after sitting up, wiggle your toes for a few minutes and wait for any dizziness to settle completely before standing.

### Can you get out of bed easily?

Q I find it physically difficult to get in or out of bed Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

If you are having difficulty getting on or off your bed, talk with your doctor, an occupational therapist, or a community nurse. There are adjustments and aids available that can help.

I plan to make my bedroom safer by ...

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## Bathroom and toilet

The bathroom can present a slipping hazard. Non-slip floorings are important and non-slip products in the shower or bath, such as paints or self-adhesive non-slip strips, can make these areas less slippery.

If you feel you need additional support, grab rails in the bath or shower and beside the toilet are a good idea. An occupational therapist can advise you of the correct position for grab rails in your bathroom.

When bathing or showering, have all your toiletries within easy reach so you do not need to stretch or bend to use them. A shower caddy can help to keep them organised and off the floor so they don't trip you up.

**Q I tend to hold onto taps or towel rails to get in or out of the bath or shower** Yes  No

**A If you answered 'Yes'**

Taps and towel rails are not designed to hold the weight of a person. Grab rails can be installed to provide you with reliable and safe support.

**Q I feel unsteady standing in the shower** Yes  No

**A If you answered 'Yes'**

Think about using a shower stool or chair. Do not use a plastic garden stool or chair as these can be dangerous. They are not designed to be slip resistant or to withstand hot water or soap. They can slide or collapse without warning.

### Tips to help with bathroom and toilet safety

- › Try to keep floors dry and mop up any wet puddles as soon as possible.
- › If you are sometimes unsteady, a hand-held shower hose, a shower chair or bath seat can help.

### Who can help?

- › An occupational therapist, the Independent Living Centre, your local community health centre or Home Assist Secure can all provide advice on bathroom equipment and modifications. Further information on these services is available on page 38.

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## Kitchen

Identify, remove or modify hazards by making your work areas more convenient for reaching.

Often the kitchen is an area used regularly, so make sure that it is organised, well lit and ventilated.

### Is your kitchen convenient and well organised?

Q The bench or counter is not at a comfortable height for me Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Counters and tables should be at the right height for your size and be sturdy enough to support your weight if you lean on them – don't use a collapsible table such as a card table.

Q The things I need are not always within easy reach Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Arrange your kitchen so the items you use most frequently are easy to reach. Place them between hip and eye level. Wall ovens at waist height are better than low ovens.

### Tips to help with kitchen safety

- › A tray-mobile or trolley can be useful to transport items safely.
- › Clean up spills immediately using a long handled mop and remove any grease residue to prevent slips and falls.
- › If you find it necessary to reach high places, use a broad-based, sturdy and secure ladder with handrails.

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## Lounge room or living room

Identify, remove or modify hazards and make sure you have what you need within easy reach.

### Is your lounge room comfortable, convenient and free of clutter?

Q I find it difficult to get out of my lounge chair Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Chairs are easier to get in or out of if they are not too low and have solid armrests. Chairs that are low – where hips are lower than knees in the sitting position, or couches and settees with limited arm rests – can be difficult to get up from. It is easier to get up if the seat is high and the arm rests are solid.

### Tips to help in the lounge room

- › A cordless phone that you take with you means you don't need to rush to answer the phone.
- › Check for loose rugs or mats and remove any that have curled edges. Secure others using non-slip underlay purchased from hardware stores or variety stores.
- › Check that clutter on the floor doesn't become a risk. This includes items such as magazines, newspapers, craftwork and knitting on the floor near your lounge chair.

### Who can help?

- › Talk to your doctor or health professional, such as your physiotherapist, about leg strengthening exercises to help you get up from a chair more easily.

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## Floors, walkways and stairs

Like all rooms, hallways and stairs need to be well lit, preferably with 75 watt bulbs if your light fittings will take them. You may need more lights or switches installed by an electrician.

Floor surfaces that are less slippery, such as carpet or slip resistant tiles, are less of a falls risk.

Any floor coverings, particularly mats, should be checked to ensure they are in good condition and don't have holes, curled up edges or frayed sections that can trip you up.

Stairs and steps are other problem areas that need to be checked regularly for any hazards. Make sure your stairways are well lit, not slippery and that you have safe and adequate hand rails. Stairs and steps should comply with the *Building Code of Australia* as well as the *Australian Standard AS 1657-1992: Fixed platforms, walkways, stairways and ladders - Design, construction and installation*.

### Could you slip or trip on the floor coverings or on stairs?

Q I have rugs and mats throughout the house Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Check and remove loose mats or make sure they are firmly secured and are non-slip. There are non-slip products available from hardware stores that can be applied to floors and rugs or mats.

Q I have electrical cords running across walkways Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Avoid having electrical extension cords running across floors by having an electrician install additional power points. If you are unable to install additional power points, then move the cord to run along the walls, not across the floor. The cords can be secured with self adhesive cord clips that attach to the base of the wall.

Q The edges of my stairs are not clear

Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Clearly mark stair edges with white or yellow paint or adhesive non-slip stair edging. These are available for a minimal cost from most hardware stores.

If the stairs are carpeted, the carpet should have a short pile, be light in colour and not heavily patterned.

Q My stairs or steps lack handrails

Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Homes built before 1992 may not have adequate handrails. Handrail height should not be less than 900mm or more than 1100mm. Make sure there are handrails on at least one side of all steps and stairways. Ideally, there should be handrails on both sides of steps and stairways.

### Tips to help with floors and stairs

- › Highly polished floors and shiny tiles can be very slippery, so be careful that any cleaning products don't leave too much residue that makes the floor too slippery or too sticky.

### Who can help?

- › An electrician can fit extra power points or light switches and can also check your light fittings to see if they can take a 75 watt bulb.

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## Outside the home

Identify, remove or modify hazards by ensuring your outside space is orderly and well lit.

Areas outside the home need to be safe, well lit and have properly maintained surfaces – especially outdoor tiles and paths which can become slippery when wet.

In public places, look out for trip and slip hazards. If you notice something that could cause falls, report it to the relevant authority eg. the local council or shopping centre management.

### Is your home in good shape outside?

Q The paths around my house are cracked and in disrepair Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Check for broken pavers and ask for help to have any raised pavers re-laid. Keep paths free of moss and leaves, and remove any obstacles such as gardening tools, hoses and small pots.

Q The public footpath near my house is cracked or in disrepair Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

Take a photo of the damaged footpath area and send it with a letter or email describing the location and type of hazard to your local council. You may need to follow up the progress of your letter or email.

### Tips to help with safety outside your home

- › Outside steps and stairs may need non-slip edging. Leaf litter should also be removed.
- › Many bad falls result from the use of ladders, so use appropriate safe equipment and ask for assistance. If this is not available, consider postponing the task until someone can help.

### Who can help?

- › Home Assist Secure can assist with minor home maintenance, repairs, modifications and security if these changes will help with your health, safety and security. Further information on Home Assist Secure is available on page 38.

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## Home maintenance

Many falls result from trying to do jobs that are too hard to reach. If you have odd jobs that need doing, make sure you have the right equipment or consider asking someone to either do it or help you with it. Don't risk your health and independence by doing it alone.

Q I don't really think much about safety before I tackle odd jobs Yes  No

A If you answered 'Yes'

If you use what is close at hand, such as a stool or a chair, instead of the right equipment, you put yourself at risk of the stool or chair toppling over. Make sure you keep a sturdy stepladder with handrails handy.

### Tips to help with home maintenance

- Move frequently used items to within easy reach to reduce the need for ladders.
- Check regularly that your stepladder or step stool is in good condition. The best ladders are sturdy, broad-based ladders with handrails and are available from hardware stores.
- Make sure you have another person with you when you are using a stepladder or ladder.

### Who can help?

- Further information on Home Assist Secure is available on page 38.

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