

Simple Solutions

Practical ideas and products to enhance independent living.



The Hartford

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Have you taken a good look around your home to see if it will accommodate the changes you may experience as you age? Have you done a similar scan at the home of an older relative or friend where you might be helping out?

It's not a bad idea. We make sure our homes are protected against break-ins and we're vigilant about making them safe for visiting children. Why not make them more comfortable and convenient to accommodate the normal age-related physical changes that occur as we age? Why not make the home more functional and safe to accommodate limitations we may experience due to disease or chronic health conditions?

Solutions guide

At some point, many of us will find that the house that once fit us so perfectly no longer does. Maybe it's the stairs or the bathtub or the carpet or the lighting. But, given that most of us would prefer to remain in our homes rather than move, it makes sense to change our homes to accommodate these changing needs.

The Hartford's team of gerontologists created this guide of products and ideas to help you create a living space that works well at all different points in life. Whether you're making a structural modification or buying a simple household product, you'll find creative ways to make any home safer and more comfortable for people of any age.

Many of these products are inexpensive and easy to install, and the ideas can make your home more functional without looking institutional.

This guide includes:

- *Solutions Guide*, starting on page 4, which provides more than 200 products and ideas.
- A *Home Checklist* on page 30 that will help you apply these ideas to any home.

You can find many of the products listed in this guide at hardware, home improvement, or discount stores, as well as through online retailers.

We hope you will find this booklet useful in creating a home that can accommodate changing needs and enhance independent living for anyone.

Please note that the inclusion of a product in this guide does not constitute a product endorsement or warranty by The Hartford Insurance Group, Inc. You are advised to evaluate for yourself the appropriateness of any product or idea listed.



Vision solutions

Many of us will experience change in our vision by the time we reach 50. We may notice the restaurant menu print is too small or the room doesn't seem bright enough. We may be bothered by these changes but we easily manage them.

More difficult to deal with is the uncorrectable "low vision" caused by eye diseases such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetes. People with low vision have trouble reading, may be unable to distinguish certain colors and often can't see low furniture or a slightly raised surface like a door threshold.

No matter what level of visual changes you're dealing with, the following solutions can make any home a little brighter and easier to navigate.

Lighting

Design and other ideas

- Provide sufficient, even lighting throughout the house; you need more than you think you do. A 60-year-old requires approximately twice as much light to read as a 20-year-old. Start by increasing the amount of natural light; open the blinds and curtains and raise shades. Move large items that might be blocking light away from the windows.
- Add lighting to eliminate any dark or shadowy areas.
- Install additional lighting where safety hazards exist, such as overhead in the bathtub and shower and in stairways, sites of most accidents in the home.
- Choose light-colored wall coverings, work surfaces and counters to increase the reflectivity of available light.
- Control glare throughout the home by selecting matte-finish paint, wallpaper, counter tops, and other surface materials.

Vision products

- 1 Use a 100- to 200-watt bulb to provide extra light, and position lamps carefully for such close-up activities as cooking, dining, reading, writing, handiwork, shaving, and especially, taking medication. Use a wall or floor lamp with a swing-arm to help direct light where you need it. Magnifying attachments are available for some task light options.
- 2 Use long lasting “daylight” or full spectrum light bulbs, or purchase a daylight lamp to reduce eye strain and improve concentration. These glare-free bulbs are made of special glass that allows the true spectrum of colors to be seen, enhances the contrast between black and white, and contributes to greater well-being.
- 3 Install a cordless battery-operated light or use a cordless floor lamp wherever additional lighting is needed and no electrical outlets are available, such as in closets or cabinets, at your chair for reading, or above a desk or table.
- 4 Install fluorescent lights under overhead kitchen cabinets and over the stove to provide extra illumination for meal preparation.
- 5 If you like to read in bed, buy a light that clamps onto the headboard to provide better illumination.
- 6 Place a night light in the pathway between the bedroom and bathroom, where falls often occur. You may want to opt for an automatic light that turns itself on at dusk and off at dawn, or one that is motion sensitive.
- 7 Add a motion-sensitive adaptor to an existing light fixture or lamp so that it will turn on automatically when someone enters the room.
- 8 Adapt an interior light to turn on at dusk or at a predetermined time with a plug-adaptor into which a standard lamp or light bulb is inserted.
- 9 Never come home to a darkened front door or sidewalk. Adapt the existing exterior lighting at your entry, porch or light post by simply screwing a solar-activated photoelectric socket into the light fixture, and then screwing the light bulb back into the socket. The light will automatically turn on at dusk and off at dawn. Purchase solar-powered light fixtures to light your sidewalk and yard. Battery-powered LED lights are also available.
- 10 Install motion-sensitive security lights for extra exterior lighting coverage.
- 11 Buy an emergency light that goes on automatically during electrical outages and doubles as a flashlight.
- 12 Make sure all lights, including chandeliers, have translucent shades, as looking directly into uncovered light bulbs can be painful and hasten deterioration of the eye's retina.
- 13 Use a handy mini-light that snaps onto your house key to illuminate a dark keyhole. The key light yields a bright beam of light for an added measure of safety and convenience.
- 14 Control glare from sunlight with proper window treatments. Miniblinds will deflect the sun's light, while sheer draperies and translucent or perforated shades will diffuse it.
- 15 Eliminate the glare of the sun, reduce fading of drapes and furniture, and insulate against heat and cold with tinted, transparent adhesive vinyl placed on the inside surface of your windows.

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Vision products

Visual tasks

Design and other ideas

- Keep emergency numbers clearly written in large type near all telephones and/or programmed into cell phones.

16 To compensate for difficulty in reading small numbers and fine print, buy items featuring large typefaces with extra white space between lines of print. Examples include:

- Bathroom scale
- Books
- Calendar
- Clock
- Measuring tape
- Watch
- Kitchen timer
- Cookbooks

17 Make your own tactile, large print and/or Braille markings to ease identification of controls on appliances and equipment. Handy options include stick-on letters/numerals, labels, buttons, and liquid marking systems.

18 Raised numerals and Braille dots on a ruler or tape measure allow a person with vision impairment to locate each increment of measurement.

19 Large numbers on measuring cups and spoons make reading measurements easier. Some measuring cups and spoons are also color coded for easy identification.



20 Buy a thermostat that features large numerals and raised temperature settings that click and vibrate each time the thermostat is adjusted. Some also include a “talking” feature. Or, buy a magnifier that snaps over an existing round thermostat.

21 Buy large print stickers for push button phones or a large print dial overlay for rotary dial telephones. These items lay over the buttons or dial and feature large numerals and letters that are widely spaced for easy identification.

22 Use a telephone that features large buttons, a lighted dial, large text Caller ID, and volume and sound clarifying adjustments.

23 Buy a “talking” alarm clock, watch, or alarm clock key chain with large numerals and adjustable volume. Some clocks also project the time in large print text onto the wall or ceiling.

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Vision products

- 24** Avoid the need to read tiny print and reduce medication errors by using a Talking Rx that plays prerecorded prescription information. A pharmacist or caregiver records instructions for taking the medication into the Talking Rx. When the medication bottle is set into the base and a button is activated, these instructions are read to the user. Two sizes are available to accommodate different size containers.
- 25** Utilize other “talking” products to provide important audible information for those with low vision:
- Personal scale
 - Kitchen scale
 - Measuring container
 - Coffee maker
 - Microwave oven
 - Kitchen timer
 - Indoor/outdoor thermometer
 - Clinical and ear thermometer
 - Glucose meter
 - Blood pressure monitor
 - Pedometer
 - Calendar
 - Calculator
 - Compass
 - Tape measure
 - Weather forecaster
 - Tire gauge
- 26** Attach a magnifier to the screen of a cell phone or smart phone to increase the size of the display for easier reading. “Jitterbug” cell phones offer larger numerals/text, backlit buttons, color screen for clarity, and adjustable sound features.
- 27** Attach a magnifying device to the screen of your computer monitor (either laptop or standard). Some devices also reduce painful glare on the computer screen.
- 28** Affix large print or Braille labels to the keys of your computer keyboard. White on black as well as black on white options are available.
- 29** Purchase a large-print keyboard with high contrast between the letters and the keys. Some keyboards are designed for one-handed operation, are foldable, or feature Braille characters.
- 30** Increase the size of text on your computer screen with special Zoomtext software that makes the text easier to see, hear, and use. A special USB drive makes it possible to use Zoomtext on any computer.
- 31** Install television screen enlargers to increase the size of any TV image without distortion.
- 32** A TV remote control with large buttons and high-contrasting numerals/text is easy to use. Buttons on some models glow in the dark or “talk” when the buttons are pressed.
- 33** View text from books, personal papers, and other reading material in a larger format on your TV or computer screen using a CCTV (electronic magnifier) device. Smaller wireless “mouse magnifiers” and portable CCTV devices are also helpful.
- 34** Use a hands-free magnifier when doing work with both hands. Choose from a magnifier for table use, an adjustable 36” stand or one that fastens around the neck or about the head. Some also include lighting.

Continued...

Vision products

- 35 Keep a hand-held magnifying glass or magnifying sheet handy. Some include a built-in light.
- 36 A magnifying cap remover, called a Medi-Cap, can be handy when taking medications. The 4x magnifier makes reading labels easier, while the design of the Medi-Cap facilitates the removal of pill bottle tops.
- 37 Small tools with built-in magnifiers make personal care activities easier:
 - Scissors
 - Nail clippers
 - Tweezers
 - Medication cap remover
 - Pill cutter
 - Needle-nose pliers
- 38 Those who have trouble discriminating between colors can use a product that “reads” and announces colors. Some products include an earphone jack and carrying case, and are available in both English and Spanish.

Color can influence our lives

Design and other ideas

- Choose colors that will remain visible and can be differentiated from one another, for example, use colors from the red-orange family against blue, green or other cool colors.
- To help objects stand out from their backgrounds and to help distinguish between surface levels, furnishings, and potential safety hazards, use the “contrast principle” where the object you want people to see contrasts with its background. For example, light-colored wall coverings will contrast with darker floors to bring attention to a vertical vs. horizontal surface. The colors of draperies, upholstery, furniture, cabinets – even the light switch plates and the tableware – can be chosen to contrast with their backgrounds for enhanced visibility.
- Choose dishes that contrast with the color of the table or placemat so they are easier to identify. The center of a plate should be a solid, light color so food can be seen clearly.
- To help signal a change in elevation between adjacent rooms, use flooring that is in strong-contrasting colors. If the floors are the same level, use the same or similar intensities of floor colors.
- Choose a counter top color that contrasts with the color of the floor beneath, to enable the counter’s edge to be easily seen.



Hearing solutions

For various reasons, we can experience some degree of hearing loss as we get older. It may merely be a nuisance – we might find it hard to hear certain tones or to hold a conversation in a noisy room.

But hearing problems can go beyond annoying and venture into dangerous if, for example, we can't hear a smoke alarm or the whistle on a teakettle.

The following design changes and products address hearing issues with solutions that can help things sound a little clearer – and make the home a little safer.

Hearing

Design and other ideas

- Use carpeting, upholstered furniture and fabric window treatments instead of hard surfaces, such as wood and tile floors and walls, to reduce echo and absorb noise.
- Hang a textured, acoustical wallcovering where appropriate (e.g., over a desk or lowered work area in the kitchen) to help absorb sound and echoes. The acoustical wallcovering can double as a surface for tacking up emergency phone numbers, reminders and other notices.
- Place chairs three to six feet apart and facing each other to facilitate conversation for people with hearing loss.

Hearing products

- 1 Install a volume-control attachment on the telephone to enable the user to adjust the sound level of the caller's voice. Or purchase a new telephone that features volume-control (some have "talking" caller ID features.)
- 2 Add a ringer amplification device to the telephone.
- 3 A flashing light can draw attention to a ringing phone. A special attachment plugged into the phone jack connects the telephone to a lamp. When the phone rings, the lamp flashes.
- 4 Purchase a new phone that illuminates to signal an incoming call or announces Caller ID. Some phones also include volume and sound-clarifying adjustments as well as other features helpful to those with hearing and/or sight limitations.
- 5 Use television hearing devices that allow an individual to listen to a TV without disturbing others. These devices use invisible infrared rays to carry sound from a TV set to a cordless headset that allows the user free movement over a 250-square-foot room.
- 6 Use a watch or clock that vibrates hourly or at pre-set times. Some also coordinate with bed shakers, or vibrate when alerted by a smoke alarm, doorbell, or baby monitor.
- 7 Extend the range of door chimes with a simple attachment to the chime box, which transmits the sound, up to 50 feet away, to a receiver plugged into any standard electrical outlet. Purchase a wireless door chime that can be mounted outside your door, and use a portable receiver anywhere in your home. Some also include an adjustable volume control, strobe lights and/or bed/chair shaker.
- 8 Be alerted to someone knocking on your door by installing a device that transmits the vibration to a flashing light within your home.
- 9 For an added measure of safety, select and install smoke detectors that feature flashing lights in addition to an alarm.





Mobility and balance solutions

Who among us hasn't had a bum knee or a bad back at some point? As we age, the chances of those injuries or ailments may increase. Arthritis, too, may take its toll, causing stiffness and pain that can impede our daily activities.

Compounding the mobility problem is the fact that our sense of balance can be impacted by certain conditions, disease or medication. The result can be a debilitating fall.

To address these issues of mobility and balance, take a look at how these solutions can help maintain a balance of safety and comfort in the home.

Mobility and balance

Design and other ideas

- A dense, level-loop carpet glued directly to the floor without a pad will provide greater stability and better mobility than deep, heavy pile carpeting and a thick pad.
- Many accidents occur on stairs, when people lose their balance or fail to recognize the last step or two. In addition to assuring there is sufficient lighting, install handrails with ends that curve in toward the wall and extend past the last step, on both sides of the stairs. These will provide support as well as provide warning that the last step is underfoot.
- Eliminate thresholds between different flooring materials and between rooms to eliminate a tripping hazard.

Mobility and balance products

- 1 Avoid using throw rugs, a source of slips, trips and falls. If throw rugs must be used, secure them with double-sided carpet tape, self-stick carpet mesh, or sprays.



- 2 Do not carpet stairs. Instead, highlight the edge of each stair with a textured tape in a contrasting color. Mark stairs in dark or potentially dangerous areas with a fluorescent tape that is nonskid, flexible and waterproof. Or, use rubber stair treads to reduce slipping.
- 3 Replace a standard door hinge with an offset door hinge to add two inches of clearance to a narrow doorway and provide for greater access for wheelchairs and other mobility aids.
- 4 Slide a “sofa saver” beneath the sagging cushions of chairs, sofas and mattresses to provide firmer support and facilitate getting in and out of the seat or bed more easily.
- 5 Place an automatic “seat assist” in your chair; this will enable you to get up more easily because it will gradually elevate you to your feet. No special installation, wiring, or electrical connections are needed.

- 6 Use the handle of a bed support rail to facilitate getting into or out of bed. Offering even greater stability and balance, some types of rails include a platform that slides securely between the mattress and box spring, while others adjust in height to form a brace between the floor and ceiling alongside the bed.

- 7 Reduce the potential for falls on a wet bathroom floor by installing a slip-resistant flooring material, such as sheet vinyl, vinyl tile, sheet rubber, or rubber tiles.

- 8 Place a microfiber bath mat at the edge of the tub or shower to absorb water on the bathroom floor and reduce the danger of slipping and falling. To optimize safety, it's best to choose a color that contrasts with the flooring. Be sure to be aware of the edges of the mat when using.

- 9 Place a portable bath step with slip resistant surface and rubberized feet just outside or just inside the edge of the tub. This makes getting into and out of the tub safer. Two steps can be stacked for use with deeper tubs.

- 10 Use a specially designed “bath board” to make getting into and out of the tub easier and safer. The user simply sits on the edge of the tub and slides across the non-slip board surface.

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Mobility and balance products

Mobility and balance

Design and other ideas

- “Low profile” furniture, such as a coffee table or footstool, presents a tripping hazard. Place a low table between two chairs rather than in front of a sofa.
- Select seating with appropriate heights (approximately 17-18 inches from the floor) and depths, well placed, wide arms that extend to the front edge of the seat, and supportive backs – all of which will make sitting down and getting up easier. When you are seated, your upper legs should be parallel to the floor, and your feet should rest flat on the floor. Chairs that are too low, too high or too deep do not provide appropriate back support and can cause legs and feet to swell or fall asleep. Chairs that do not include properly designed arms can contribute to poor posture, backaches, neck aches and muscle fatigue.
- Install the bathroom vanity at a “back saver” height – 36” instead of the standard 32” – to reduce the need for excessive bending at the sink.
- Hang a vertical mirror so that its bottom reaches to the counter top level of the bathroom vanity to allow the mirror to be used while a person is standing or sitting.



- 11 People who are unsteady on their feet can bathe or shower more safely by using a portable chair with a back and rubber feet. The chair is placed in the tub or shower. Some products include seats that rotate for easier use, many include arms, some have adjustable height seats, and many can be folded for storage. For additional stability and comfort, use a combination safety seat/transfer bench.
- 12 Install a hand-held shower hose to make bathing safer and easier. A wall-mounted hose holder installed at a convenient height provides the perfect hanger when the hose is not in use.
- 13 Place a non-slip, machine washable and mildew resistant vinyl mat in the bathtub and shower to help guard against falls.
- 14 Install a “comfort height” toilet with an 18” high seat (16 ½” to the rim) to replace a standard residential toilet.
- 15 Add a seat extender to an existing toilet to raise the height of the seat. Some models also include arms for added support.

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Mobility and balance products

- 16 Install grab bars in the tub and shower. Be sure to securely mount the grab bars into studs or walls backed with wood blocking for additional safety. Otherwise, an unsteady individual might pull an unanchored grab bar from the wall, resulting in a fall.
- 17 Install decorative grab bars that can double as towel bars at key locations in the bathroom, including adjacent to the toilet and within the tub or shower space. A grab bar provides greater support for unsteady individuals who may reach for a towel bar to steady themselves.
- 18 If wall-mounted grab bars are difficult to install, buy an adjustable safety rail that clamps onto the edge of any bathtub to provide a steady hand-hold when getting into or rising from the tub.



- 19 Install a barrier-free walk-in bathtub and shower. These fiberglass tubs look like standard bathtubs, but come equipped with a water-tight door for easy walk-in access.
- 20 Lay tape that is textured and/or “glows in the dark” in a contrasting color at the threshold of the shower to mark the potential safety hazard of a raised threshold. The tape’s abrasive surface also enhances safety on a wet surface.
- 21 Install a wall-mounted, extending magnifying mirror near the vanity to allow a person to sit while shaving, applying makeup, inserting contacts or performing other personal grooming tasks. Portable, lighted magnifying mirrors are also convenient.
- 22 Maintain traction and balance when walking on ice and snow using stretch bands with grippers that slip over your shoes or boots.



Strength, dexterity and reach solutions

Although we can take steps to maintain health and functional status as we age, it is not uncommon for some individuals to lose strength and dexterity. It may get a little harder to lift a cooked dish out of the oven, to button a shirt or to carry a bag of groceries.

The problem is even worse for frail adults who may have had several impairments over the years and for those who have osteoporosis or other diseases that impact bone and muscle strength. They are more likely to fall – and the results can be serious.

Depending on the level of the problem, there are a number of solutions to address issues of strength, dexterity and reach. See which ones will help you create a more functional and comfortable home.

Strength and dexterity

Design and other ideas

- Replace round doorknobs with lever handles. Round doorknobs pose problems for many people who have arthritis, limited strength or difficulty grasping. Lever handles also benefit small children or anyone who may have their hands full.
- Install a built-in wall oven at counter height to reduce the need to bend over to move hot, heavy pans.

Strength, dexterity and reach products

- 1 As an inexpensive alternative to replacing round doorknobs, buy lever adapters that can be clamped onto round door knobs, converting them into lever handles.



- 2 Cover doorknobs, sink and tub faucets, and outside water faucet handles with soft ribbed grips to provide a non-slip gripping surface and make handling conventional knobs and handles easier.
- 3 Install lever faucet handles in the kitchen and bathroom sinks, and in the bathtub and shower.



- 4 If changing sink, tub and shower hardware is too costly, buy a gripper tap-turner that will fit over existing faucets, converting standard faucets into lever faucets.
- 5 Install a “touchless” water faucet, which automatically turns on the flow of water when you place your hands under the faucet. These are ideal for people with arthritis, rheumatism or limited dexterity.

- 6 Install an oversized rocker switch to replace standard wall-mounted light switches so that lights are easier to turn on and off. Some switches are illuminated and visible in the dark or function with wireless devices.



- 7 Use special floor and table lamps that feature large on/off rocker switches in easy-to-reach locations (instead of small, round knobs located near hot light bulbs). Some lamps come equipped with night lights, handy convenience outlets, weighted bases, and/or washable shades that give glare-free lighting.
- 8 Replace the small, round on/off knobs found on many floor and table lamps with easy-grip “lamp switch extension levers” that can be threaded onto most standard lamps. Three large spokes on the new switches make it easier for people with arthritis or limited dexterity to turn lamps on and off.



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Strength, dexterity and reach products

- 9 Avoid burns from hot light bulbs and eliminate the need to reach for difficult-to-turn switches on lamps by converting metal base lamps into ones that can be turned on or off simply by touching the base. Simply insert the gadget between the light bulb and socket, or plug the converter into an outlet. Purchasing a touch-on table lamp is also an option.
- 10 Equip non-metal-base lamps and other small appliances with remote on-off devices.
- 11 Install a voice- or sound-activated adapter so that you can turn on lights and other appliances without getting up from your chair. Simply plug the adapter into any electrical outlet and then plug the lamp, TV, etc., into the adapter.
- 12 If your furniture has difficult-to-grasp drawer or door pulls, try attaching decorative tassels that are easier to pull.
- 13 Fit a triangular-shaped gripper with a center hole over pens, pencils, toothbrushes, and small tools so that they are easier to grasp. Use steady-grip writing pens or a writing aid to make writing easier.
- 14 Use a button valet to pull difficult-to-hold buttons through a button hole. Use a zipper-pull on difficult-to-hold zippers.



- 15 Replace knobs or recessed grips with C-shaped drawer, cabinet and closet door handles for easier opening.
- 16 Use a handy knob and dial turner to make adjusting the controls on kitchen appliances easy.
- 17 Look for cookware and lids with special ergonomically shaped handles that are easier to grip for people with limited hand, wrist, or forearm strength, dexterity, and range of motion. Two handles are helpful on frying pans and pots for more even weight distribution.
- 18 Consider installing energy-saving windows that pop inward for easy cleaning from inside the house.
- 19 Cups and glasses should be easy for a person with arthritis or an unsteady hand to grasp. Choose short-stemmed or footed glassware. Look for mugs with large or double handles.

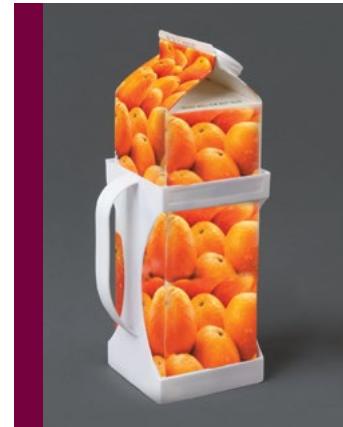
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Strength, dexterity and reach products

- 20 Use bowls with non-slip bases to make mixing easier.
- 21 Use non-skid rubber pads to hold dishes firmly in place and to open tightly-sealed jars and bottles.
- 22 Use a toothbrush, razor, cutlery, small utensil, or gardening tools with ergonomic handles. Or, use ergonomic holders into which the handles of various products can slide.



- 23 A hands-free hair dryer stand allows for one- or two-hand styling. Its flexible neck can be adjusted to any angle for styling needs.
- 24 Use a cutting board with suction-cup feet to make slicing and peeling safe and easy. Some products feature corner guards and steel prongs to hold food in place. Others include knives.
- 25 Turn a quart or half-gallon container into an easy-to-use pitcher with a carton holder designed for easy lifting and no-slip, no-spill pouring.
- 26 A rolling mincer or food chopper makes mincing and chopping easy and safe and allows for one-handed operation.



- 27 Secure fruits, vegetables, bread or meat while slicing by using a special holder. This can help to prevent hand injuries.
- 28 Use a double spatula turner to safely lift or turn hot or large food items.
- 29 Make cutting projects easier with easy-to-grip or push-down scissors. These items allow a person to use gentle pressure to operate the scissors and are self-opening once the pressure has been released. Rolling scissors have no blades and require only a gentle push to cut through paper. Some scissors are battery-operated and require only a simple squeeze to start the blades.
- 30 A rocking T-knife or pizza cutter, or a slicer, can be used to cut food more easily than with a straight-handled knife.
- 31 Wear cut-resistant gloves to protect hands from cuts and scrapes while peeling, cutting, or dicing food, using food graters and zesters, pruning, or working with hand tools.

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Strength, dexterity and reach products

- 32** To make screw-top lids easier to open, use a special hand-held jar and bottle opener or an opener that attaches to the bottom of an overhead cabinet. Some of these products are electric or battery-powered.



- 33** To open cans with one hand, mount an electric can opener to the underside of the overhead cabinet or use a lightweight cordless hand-held can opener.

- 34** Use a special accessory to open cartons, bags, and beverage containers more easily.

- 35** Select Lock & Lock or OXO food storage containers with specially-designed lids that can be opened or closed with one hand or by those with arthritis.

- 36** Add a detachable, flexible sink hose so you can fill pots on the kitchen counter, eliminating the need to lift heavy, water-filled pots from the sink.

- 37** To eliminate the need to stand for long stretches while preparing meals, lower a section of the kitchen counter to table height and provide a comfortable chair. This work area can also double as a desk or computer area.

- 38** Use easy-hold nail clippers featuring oversized grips that are designed for people with diminished grip and dexterity. Some also feature a suction cup base to stabilize the clippers. Reaching your toes is easier when using a toenail scissor with a longer, easy-to-grip handle and angled head.



- 39** Use one of several new types of hand-held rolling snow removers, which do not require bending or lifting the snow in order to clear a sidewalk or driveway. As an alternative, use a snow shovel with an ergonomic handle. These items may be available on a seasonal basis.

- 40** Consider purchasing a lightweight vacuum that requires less strength to push than do conventional models.

- 41** Vacuum or mop your floor without bending and stretching using a robotic device that automatically traverses the floor of your rooms.

- 42** Use ergonomic garden tools that help wrists maintain a neutral position when the user is seated or kneeling at ground level.

- 43** Increase your grip and leverage when unlocking doors and overcome hard-to-turn locks by slipping an E-Z Key Turner over the key.

- 44** Apply E-Z Lube & Slide lubricant to sliding patio door and window tracks so that people with limited strength and dexterity can open them more easily.

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Strength, dexterity and reach products

Making reaching easier

Design and other ideas

- To put more shelves within easy reach, lower overhead kitchen cabinets to 15 inches above the counter instead of the standard 18 - 24 inches.
- Buy a side-by-side, self-defrosting refrigerator-freezer, accessible to people with limited reach, including wheelchair users. Some people may find a freezer at the bottom more convenient.
- Install the garbage disposal switch at the front of the counter.
- Consider whether a sink with side-mounted faucets would be easier to use for people with limited reach, such as wheelchair users.
- Mount the medicine cabinet in the bathroom on the side of the sink at counter height to increase the visibility of contents and to make items more accessible.

45

Have a multi-use “reacher” handy for removing lightweight items from upper shelves or for picking up dropped items.



46

Reach items in higher places more safely by using a step stool with a handrail and steps covered with non-slip rubber mats. Wide-spread legs on the stool make the stool steadier.

47

Install extenders on difficult-to-reach wall light switches to make them accessible from a sitting position.

48

Add a remote wireless light switch to facilitate turning lights on from wherever you are in a room. The light switch plate self-adheres to the wall, while the wireless receiver screws into the light bulb socket.

49

Make contents in the kitchen more accessible with inexpensive organizers that also increase storage space. Look for a swing shelf for under-the-sink storage, lazy Susans, pot/pan lid organizers, roll-out can dispensers, spice racks, kitchen wrap organizers, and expand-a-shelves for cabinets. A sliding storage drawer/shelf installed inside wall-mounted and base cabinets is also handy.



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Strength, dexterity and reach products

- 50** Put on and take off shoes, socks, and hosiery without bending by using a long-handled shoe horn or sock tool. Other long-handled products include lotion applicators and bath brushes.
- 51** Use magnetic paper- and hand-towel holders which can be attached to the refrigerator at a convenient height.
- 52** Turn a closet into a pantry for additional, accessible storage. Install adjustable shelving. Increase storage space by adding a storage shelf to the back of the pantry door. Also available are hanging wire baskets that slide easily onto shelves to accommodate linens, plates, kitchen wraps, and other shallow items.
- 53** Outfit bedroom closets with hanging or stacking shelves to make contents more accessible.
- 54** Organize items on kitchen or closet shelves by using vertical shelf dividers which slide onto shelves.
- 55** Create extra storage space and more accessible hanging space by adding a second clothes rod that hangs from your existing closet rod.



- 56** Place hanging clothing within easier reach by attaching a multi-loop hook to the clothes rod. Standard hangers are then hung in the loops.
- 57** Use tools with long handles to more easily undertake household tasks.
 - Featuring a non-allergenic, electrostatically charged fiber head, a long-handled duster reaches ceilings, cabinets, etc., and attracts dust.
 - Use a long-handled dust pan and brush to clean up without having to bend over.
 - Make cleaning your floors, walls, tubs, and showers easier by using a swivel-head mop or brush on a long handle; these facilitate cleaning hard-to-reach spots without bending or getting on your hands and knees.

- 58** Clean overhead gutters without standing on a ladder by using a “gutter blaster” with long handle.





Memory solutions

As we age, occasionally we may struggle to remember a name or forget where we put our glasses. Such occasional forgetfulness can be bothersome, but usually isn't serious.

But for some older people, memory problems signify a more serious problem such as mild cognitive impairment or dementia. Dementia is the loss of thinking, memory, and reasoning skills to the point where it seriously affects someone's ability to carry out daily activities.

People living with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia need a safe home that will accommodate them as their disease progresses. Caregivers need to look at the home through a new lens to identify and correct safety risks. The following solutions can help create an environment that is safer and easier to manage.

(NOTE: Because the progression of dementia is unique to each individual, caregivers should tailor adjustments to those specific needs and make adjustments over time, as needed.)

Memory solutions

Design and other ideas

- Use memory aids such as a large calendar, a list of daily activities, and written instructions for various tasks.
- Attach pictures illustrating a cabinet's contents to the front of the cabinet door.
- Use appliances that have automatic shut-off devices, such as irons, toaster ovens and coffeemakers.
- Remove unnecessary furniture to make it easier to navigate around a room.

Memory products

- 1 Locate misplaced keys or other items with a wireless key/object finder. Press a button on the locator device and an alarm attached to the lost item will sound if it is within 60 feet.
- 2 Wear a timer to remind you of food in the oven, starting time for an event, or other important tasks.
- 3 Touch the photograph of a family member, friend, or service provider on a photo phone to automatically dial that individual. Photodialing attachments can also be purchased to be added to existing phones.



- 5 Be reminded of the time to take your prescriptions by using a special organizer with a “voice reminder” and an audible or vibrating alarm. These organizers also include features to prevent people from taking too many pills or from taking their pills at the wrong time. Some also document that medication was dispensed or include reminders for other tasks such as blood pressure monitoring; some can be secured to the wall so they are not misplaced.
- 6 Install a motion sensor alarm on doors and windows to alert household members of an individual’s attempt to wander from the home. Special alarms for garage doors are also available.
- 7 Place a water alert sensor in a sink, tub, or basement to signal a flood or overflow. When the water alert sensor is activated, it sends a loud signal to the receiver, providing audio and visual indicators.

- 4 Use a small digital recorder to keep track of schedules, phone numbers, “to do” lists, and other important information.



Fire and burn safety solutions

Our homes contain many fire hazards. Most fires do not start spontaneously, but may result from unintentional actions or oversights.

As we age, potential changes in reflexes and dexterity may slow reaction time. Changes in skin can diminish the sensation of pain. Decreased lung capacity can exacerbate smoke inhalation injury. Limitations in vision, hearing or judgment can hinder the ability to detect a fire or escape its effects.

The following design ideas and products can help you be prepared and protect yourself and your loved ones from the dangers of fire.

Fire and burn safety

Design and other ideas

- Buy a range with staggered burners on the top and with controls at the front to eliminate any need to reach over hot burners, pots and pans.
- When replacing wallcoverings or flooring, check to be sure that new materials are “Class A” or “Type I,” meeting the most stringent fire safety standards.
- Set the hot water heater at a safe temperature (110-120 degrees). Most hot water heaters have been set at 150 degrees, a temperature that can cause severe burns in thirty seconds or less.

Fire and burn safety products

- 1 Install an anti-scald mechanism on the pipes under the bathroom and kitchen sinks. The mechanism automatically mixes hot and cold water to a pre-set, non-scalding temperature.
- 2 Install an anti-scald safety valve on all shower heads and faucets to protect against hot water scalding. These valves instantly react to scalding hot water by reducing the spray to a trickle. Or install a shower head and shower stopper that automatically shuts off when water becomes too hot.
- 3 Replace pot holders with heat resistant, firm, comfortable grips that slip over the handles of saucepans and skillets.



- 4 Reduce the potential for burns with an elbow length, flame retardant oven mitt or a special heat resistant glove that protects hands when removing items from a hot oven, changing light bulbs, or placing logs on the fire.



- 5 Use a notched wooden or curved metal stick to push or pull hot oven racks or dishes within the oven.
- 6 Snap a cool-touch oven guard onto the front edge of an oven rack to protect your arms from contact with the rack when reaching into a hot oven. The oven guard remains on the oven rack between uses.
- 7 Prevent hot grease or bubbling water from splattering onto arms or stove top by covering pans with splatter screens.
- 8 Microwave your food in a “cool touch” bowl that remains cool during cooking and prevents burns to your fingers. The unique handle allows you to hold the bowl with only one hand and a special lid prevents spatters.
- 9 Use a portable induction cooktop for safer cooking. Because it heats only when a pan sits on the cooking surface, and stops delivering heat seconds after the pan is removed, it is safe to the touch and energy efficient. Some models include an automatic shut-off feature, touch controls, digital timers, and can be built into the kitchen counter.
- 10 Hang a fire extinguisher or “flame-stop” spray in the kitchen to use on small fires. A third of all home fires start in the kitchen.
- 11 For added protection in case of a fire, use fire retardant foams and fabrics on upholstered furniture. Look for fire retardant window treatments and drapery sheers.

Continued...

Fire and burn safety products

- 12 Have available a fire resistant blanket that extinguishes flames when thrown on small fires, including stovetop, toaster or oven fires.
- 13 To enhance fire safety in the bedroom, cover your mattress with a fire retardant mattress cover. Buy a mattress with fire retardant foam. Use a fire retardant wool blanket on the bed.
- 14 Use fire resistant wastebaskets.
- 15 Install smoke detectors throughout your home, particularly in or near your bedroom. Most home fire fatalities occur between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. when people are most likely to be asleep. Some smoke detectors include special features as automatic flashlights, "talking" messages, flashing strobe lights, or vibration for the visually- or hearing-impaired.
- 16 Mark the location of bedrooms of children, older adults or physically challenged individuals with highly visible decals that alert firefighters to clear marked area first.
- 17 Plan for an expedient escape from the second or third story of your home in the event of a fire; purchase a folding escape ladder that hooks over the window sill.
- 18 Make sure your iron, toaster oven, coffee pot or other heat-producing appliance includes an automatic shut-off feature.
- 19 Plug TVs, computers, microwave ovens or other appliances into surge protectors to prevent electrical fires in the event of a power surge.
- 20 Use a fire retardant ironing board cover.
- 21 Battery-powered flameless candles eliminate the risk of accidental candle fires.
- 22 Use a portable or travel smoke alarm when it's not easy to install other types of smoke detectors or when traveling. Some products include a flashing light as well as an audible alarm to alert those with visual and hearing impairments of a potential fire. Some include a travel security alarm.





Additional home products

The following ideas and products are just a few more ways to help create a home that can be safer and more comfortable and livable for everyone.

- 1 Protect yourself with a plug-in or hardwired carbon monoxide detector/alarm that does not require batteries. Some include a gas alarm, battery back-up, strobe lights and “talking” voice alert features.
- 2 Install lighted switch plates that glow in the dark and are easy to see in a dark room.
- 3 Be ready for a power outage; have an emergency flashlight that is recharged by winding a hand crank for about a minute to provide 30 to 60 minutes of light. Some also feature radios and cell phone chargers.
- 4 Stay safe during an extended power outage; use a portable emergency lantern with krypton or LED bulbs that are brighter and last longer than standard bulbs, offering 20 to 40 hours of illumination.
- 5 Fit the bathroom spigot with a flexible sink hose that screws on and off easily for washing hair and other personal grooming.
- 6 Use a handy, seven-day pill reminder box to organize medications for an entire week.

Continued...

Additional home products

- 7 Divide pills in half easily and safely. Use a pill splitter that cuts the pill inside of a plastic case when pressure is applied to the top of the case. Some models also crush pills, open containers, pop pills out of foil packets, or come with pill bottle openers.



- 8 Do not leave knives loose in a drawer. Protect yourself from potential cuts by using knife guards.
- 9 If you have a shortage of electrical outlets in the kitchen, buy a UL listed outlet extender with surge protector or circuit breaker, and install under an overhead cabinet (out of sight) or on the wall.
- 10 Boil water with greater speed and safety by using an electric tea kettle, which whistles and shuts off automatically when the water has boiled.
- 11 Use a cordless portable heater with automatic shut-off that plugs directly into an electrical outlet. It will not tip over and there is no cord to become a tripping hazard.
- 12 Transport groceries, laundry, and other heavy items in a folding shopping cart. Some models can double as a walker.

- 13 Carry plastic shopping bags, milk jugs, and other containers more easily with a bag tote. The ergonomic handle with a hook slips over the bag handles and allows an individual to carry heavy and bulky items.

- 14 A rolling laundry basket will eliminate the need to bend and lift a heavy basket of clothing. Some also feature a rack for hanging clothes.

- 15 Make lawn chores easier by using a garden kneeler/sitter. The foam padding provides comfort and the sturdy locking steel frame handles assist the user in standing or kneeling. Some fold up for easy storage, while others have wheels for ease of movement.

- 16 Minimize bending and lifting associated with raking and yard work by using a lawn bag holder. Simply place a standard bag into this frame for greater convenience.



Continued...

Additional home products

- 17 Rakes with ergonomic handles and which “grab” and lift the leaves from the ground to deposit into the bag enable the user to work without bending.
- 18 See a larger, clearer, brighter image of people outside your door with a peephole that magnifies the view outside the door on a 3” digital screen. Video intercoms enable you to talk with visitors while viewing them outside your door.
- 19 Be alerted to the delivery of mail to your mailbox by using a mailbox chime that “beeps” and flashes a light to signal the mail’s arrival.
- 20 Hang a portable security alarm on interior knobs of exterior doors, or insert a similar device between the door and frame. This will warn against intruders with a loud alarm when pressure is placed on the door handle, and is ideal for travel.
- 21 Install a portable security intercom at your door or driveway; this will allow you to identify visitors from anywhere inside the house.
- 22 Prevent potential intruders from entering doors and windows with a portable door/window security device; some sound a pulsating alarm when tampered with.

- 23 Make a forced entry impossible, at home or while traveling, by using a device that fits between the floor and doorknob. When placed horizontally, the bar makes sliding glass doors immovable. Some include an alarm that sounds when entry is attempted. A wedge-shaped device is also available for doors.



- 24 Request help from people within your home easily, quickly, and without shouting by using a personal pager that is portable and requires no wiring.
- 25 Purchase or rent a personal emergency response system for added peace of mind. These systems allow individuals to live independently in their homes while having access to assistance 24 hours a day. Someone needing assistance touches a wireless remote call button that activates the system to dial a family member, neighbor, or emergency personnel. Purchased units will dial telephone numbers of your choice. Subscriber services will automatically send a signal to an emergency response center in case of an accident or other emergency.

Home checklist

Make your house a home for a lifetime

Use this handy, room-by-room checklist to assess the comfort, convenience, safety, and security of your home. Each time you answer no to a question, you have identified an opportunity for improvement. By using some of the ideas presented throughout this guidebook, you can make your house a home for a lifetime.

Throughout the house	Yes	No
Are smoke detectors installed on each floor of the home, including one near the sleeping area?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you replace smoke detector batteries at least once a year?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do wall coverings and flooring materials meet the most stringent fire safety standards (fire rated Class A or Class I)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are furnishings and draperies made with fire retardant materials?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a sufficient and evenly distributed level of lighting throughout the house and at exterior doors and walkways? Has additional lighting been installed where safety hazards exist?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is your home's hot water adjusted to a safe temperature (110-120 degrees)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are paths through rooms well lighted and free of obstructions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is your home free of thresholds that may trip or hinder movement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is your home free of scatter rugs? Or, as an alternative, have you secured area rugs and doormats with double-sided carpet tape or self-stick carpet mesh?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered replacing round doorknobs with lever handles? Or, as an alternative, purchase lever adapters to clamp onto round doorknobs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you installed a portable security intercom that will allow you to identify visitors from anywhere inside the house?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are emergency numbers posted at every telephone and/or programmed into cell phones?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered having a personal emergency response system (PERS) connected to the telephone for added peace of mind? (The system comes with a portable button that is worn or that can be affixed to the wall within the bathroom, at bedside, and in the kitchen where more emergencies tend to take place.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Home checklist

Kitchen	Yes	No
Is good lighting available over the stove, counters, sink and other areas in which food preparation and other tasks take place?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are major appliances designed to reduce bending and reaching, i.e., wall oven and side-by-side refrigerator?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are stove/oven controls easy to reach, grasp and turn?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are they located at the front edge of the appliance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there high color contrast between the text of the controls and the background color of the range, washer/dryer, and other appliances?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the size of the text easy to read?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the counter at a comfortable working height?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a lower section of the counter at table height with a chair, or a work area which allows you to work while seated?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you equipped your kitchen with safety items such as a fire extinguisher and small appliances with an automatic shut-off feature?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you installed an anti-scald mechanism on the pipe under the kitchen sink that automatically mixes hot and cold water to a pre-set, non-scalding temperature?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you equipped your kitchen with convenience gadgets such as jar and bottle opener, flexible sink hose, a long handled reacher to take light-weight items down from upper shelves, etc.?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are storage shelves/cabinets within easy reach?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is cabinet hardware easy to grasp?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered installing lever-type faucet handles in the kitchen sink? (Or, as an alternative, you can purchase a gripper tap turner to convert standard handles and controls on appliances and other equipment into lever-type ones.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Home checklist

Bathroom	Yes	No
Is there bright, non-glare producing lighting at the vanity counter, tub and shower?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the bathtub or shower easy to get into and out of?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you placed non-slip vinyl mats in bathtubs and showers to help guard against falls?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are there well-secured grab bars installed in the shower or tub?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a tub/shower seat in the bathing area?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you installed an anti-scald safety valve on shower heads and faucets to protect against hot water scalding?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do the counter tops have rounded, rather than sharp, corners to reduce the potential for injury?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bedroom	Yes	No
Are the mattress, pillows, and bedding made with fire retardant materials?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a clear and well-lighted pathway from the bed to the bathroom?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have a light or flashlight within easy reach of the bed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a telephone within easy reach of the bed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you considered outfitting closets with easy-to-reach dual-height hanging clothes bars and shelves?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stairways	Yes	No
Are stairways uncarpeted and have the edges been marked with textured tape or rubber treads to reduce slipping?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the leading edge of the steps marked with a contrasting color tape to clearly delineate this potential safety hazard?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are stairways well lighted so that each step, particularly the edges, can be clearly seen while going up and down?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do stairways have two sturdy, easy-to-grip hand rails that run continuously from the top and extend beyond the edges of the first and last stairs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are stairways free of clutter?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Resources

AARP

Visit www.aarp.org and search for these phrases:

- Home improvement
- Universal design
- Aging in place

Alzheimer's Association

Visit www.alz.org and search for this phrase:

- Safety at home

National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)

Visit www.nahb.org and search for these phrases:

- Home remodeling
- Learn about aging in place
- Universal design

National Kitchen and Bath Association

Visit www.nkba.org and search for this word:

- Remodel

National Resource Center for Supportive Housing and Home Modifications (University of Southern California)

To find information on topics such as home modifications and universal design, as well as locating architects and contractors, visit

<https://homemods.org/acl/consumerawareness/>

The Hartford's Gerontology Team

The Hartford's team of gerontologists create innovative business solutions for the mature market. They are uniquely positioned to apply knowledge of aging to develop one-of-a-kind products and services for The Hartford's customers, and specialized training for The Hartford's employees. They conduct original research in partnership with academic institutions and produces public education programs on safety, mobility and independence. The Hartford has had this in-house expertise since 1984, guiding The Hartford to unparalleled success in understanding and serving the mature market.

Simple Solutions: Practical Ideas and Products to Enhance Independent Living was created by The Hartford Center for Mature Market Excellence in collaboration with Joan A. Pease, principal, and her colleagues at Partners in Planning, Alexandria, Virginia, nationally recognized designers and planners of senior living environments.

This guide is intended to help individuals who seek information about the kinds of changes that can be made to a home environment to increase comfort, convenience and safety. It is not intended to be an exhaustive source or to relate to a particular housing situation. Readers are advised to consult the appropriate professionals to assist them in analyzing their situation and to refer to the sources identified in the section entitled "Resources" for additional information. All information and representations herein are as of August 2025.