



SAFETY FOR OLDER ADULTS with Volunteer Editor: Jeanette Wojcik
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June is National Safety Month so we are going to focus this issue of Deeper Dive on safety for older adults. [The U. S. Consumer Products Safety Commission](#) estimates that an average of 2.9 million people age 65 or older are treated in hospitals each year due to injuries sustained at home or on their property. The most common hazard for older adults is falling inside or outside the home. However, older adults (and their caregivers) should be aware of the many other safety hazards facing older adults.

Often when we talk about safety for older adults we think about ways to reduce the risk of falling but there are dozens of other situations in and around our homes that put older adults at risk. The [National Council on Aging](#) offers a very complete guide on home safety for older adults. Some of the topics covered by the NCOA resource include home security, medical alert systems, emergency phone trees, interior home safety, fire safety, electrical safety and medication safety.

Most older adults want to continue to live at home as the age, however, most of our homes are not built for older adults. There are ways to modify your home to make it safer as your age. According to [AARP](#), modification costs range from basics such as \$650 for adding grab bars in the bathroom to \$3,500 to widen a doorway to allow for a walker or wheelchair. Some other modifications might include installing additional lighting, building ramps, remodeling floors to eliminate bumps and threshold changes, making the bathroom accessible and remodeling the kitchen. The cost of these changes might be beyond what a person can afford.

If you are considering ways to make your home safer, there may be some financial help available. [Medicare](#) can be a resource for some equipment that will help you remain in your home. If you are a veteran, the [Veterans Administration](#) has programs available that will help. Some [Habitat for Humanity](#) affiliates offer an Aging in Place program where local affiliates collaborate with human service organizations to provide critical home repairs, modifications and community services to allow older adults to remain independent in their own homes.

Many caregivers and older adults have started embracing “smart” technology in order to remain independent. [Market researchers](#) have found that approximately 24% of people age 65 and older have some type of home security system and 34% have at least once smart home device such as a video doorbell, smart camera, door lock, light or thermostat. Sometimes systems are too complicated for older adults to use effectively. But even adding a few “semi-smart” tools such as sensor lights can make a difference in safety. Keep in mind that smart devices aren’t designed to eliminate human contact. We still need to check on our elderly relatives and neighbors by phone or with visits. During these visits and conversations caregivers should be alert to concerns or issues of safety expressed by the older adult. A quick visual inspection can spot hazards such as throw carpets or clutter that can cause a fall.

[Paying attention to safety in the home](#) can make a difference in being able to stay independent. Keeping windows and doors locked, making sure that smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are working, not letting strangers into the home, and protecting personal information are just a few ways that we can be safe as we age.