

Keep Them Safe - Keep You Sane: A Caregiver's Guide to a Safe Home



Lynda Shrager - The Organized Caregiver

Caregiver Stress Impacts Emotional Health

- Long-term, chronic stress, as often experienced by caregivers, negatively affects emotional and mental health, leading to higher levels of depression, anxiety, frustration, anger and guilt. (1)
- Caregivers report much higher levels of stress than people who are not caregivers. (2)
- Those who care for patients with dementia report higher levels of emotional stress and depression. (3)

Caregiver Stress Impacts Physical Health

- One study showed that caregivers had a 23% higher level of stress hormones and a 15% lower level of antibody responses than non-caregivers.
- Over time, elevated stress hormones can lead to high blood pressure and glucose levels, increasing the risk of hypertension and diabetes.
- Poorer immune response can make people more vulnerable to infections such as the flu, even after a flu shot.(4)
- High stress levels can lead to heart disease, cancer , arthritis, (5) acid reflux, headaches and body pain due to lifting and handling loved ones (6).

Common Risk Factors for Falls

- Balance and posture problems
- Low blood pressure, particularly when rising from a lying or sitting position – causes dizziness and or fainting
- Poor Vision
- Muscle weakness
- Environmental

Environmental Risk Factors

- An occupational therapy home safety assessment involves carefully assessing a person's ability and determining whether the home environment fits the person and supports independence.



Environmental Press

OTs are experts in the area of “environmental press”, a theory suggesting that the degree to which the environment presents challenges will make it harder to function in that environment and reducing the challenges makes activities easier to accomplish.

Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

I. Vision Loss

- Changes accelerate after 50 and increase in severity after 65. Discerning closely related colors, especially in blue-green spectrum may be difficult. It takes longer to focus when moving from dark to light and vice versa.

Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

Tips to Compensate for Vision Loss

- Clearly mark hazardous changes in floor levels.
- Position furniture away from areas where you walk or move often.
- Adjust illumination throughout your home. Use higher wattage bulbs where appropriate. Distribute light evenly, avoid shiny surfaces to eliminate glare.
- Add additional lighting for specific tasks and use directed lighting from behind the shoulder to reduce glare.

Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

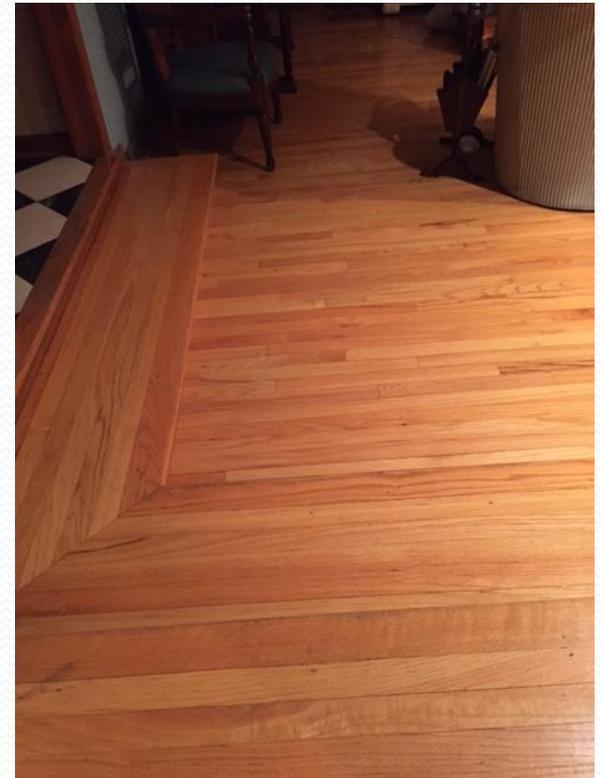
Vision Loss (cont.)

- Get organized - Keep things in the same place to make them easy to find (keys hanging on a hook by door, bulletin boards with business cards and upcoming events, calendar with appointments noted).

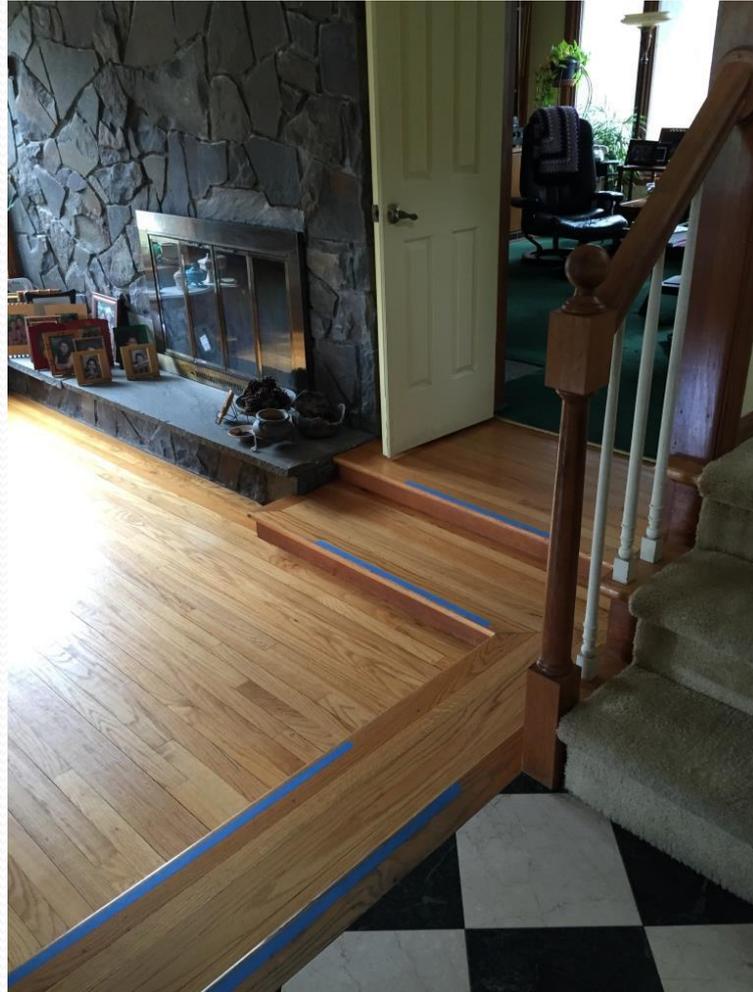
Be aware of color scheme:

- Yellow-oranges and reds are easier to distinguish
- Avoid closely related colors together. Use contrasting colors between places like doorways and walls, dishes and tablecloth, edges of steps

Hazardous Sunken Rooms

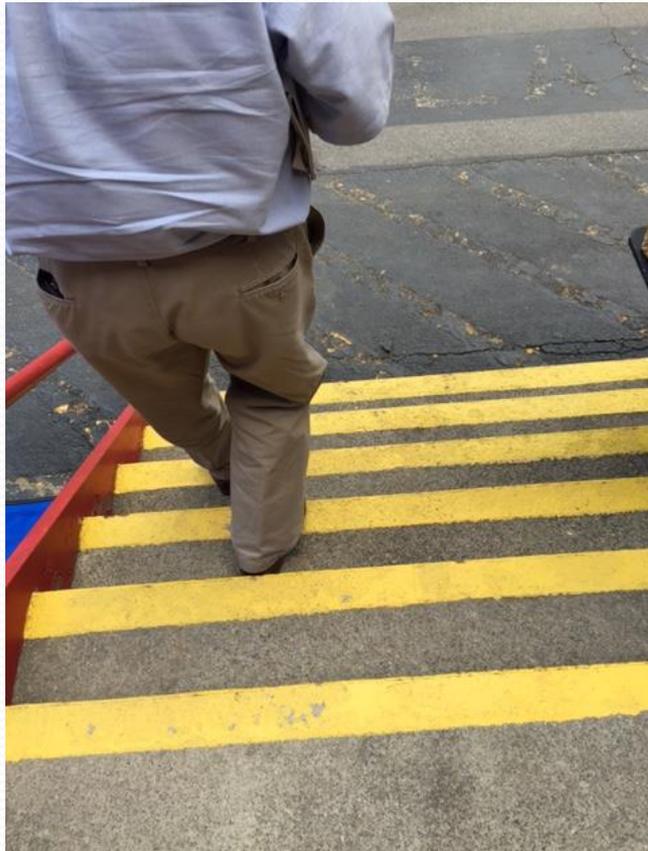


Delineate Steps



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Color Stripes Enhance Visibility

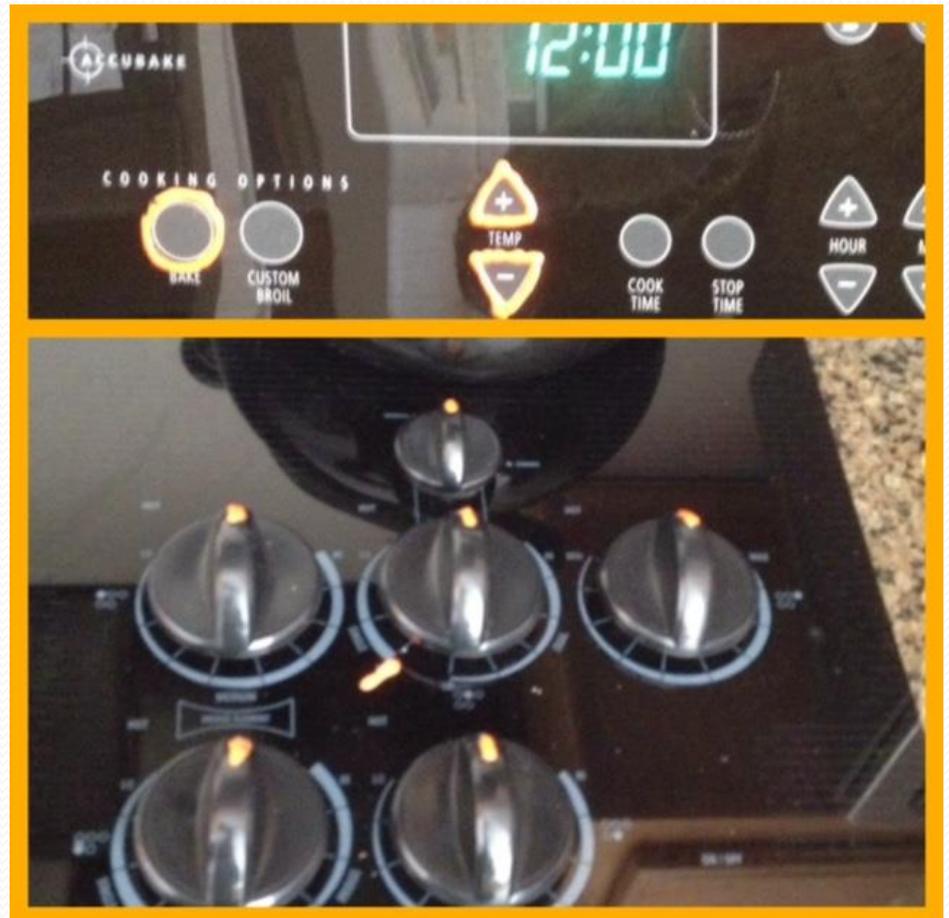


Get Organized



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Low Vision Products



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Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

II. Hearing Loss

- The most common disability among older persons. Hearing in the higher frequencies declines gradually. Background noises interfere with the ability to hear normal conversations.

Tips to Compensate Hearing Loss:

- Go to an audiologist for a baseline exam and consider a hearing aid if appropriate.
- ClearCaptions -Phone displays text of conversation on the screen
 - Amplified handset to boost sound up to 50 decibels

Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

Tips to Compensate for Hearing Loss (cont.):

- Audible warnings can be accompanied by visual or vibrating devices (flashing lights for doorbells, vibrating alarm clock placed under the pillow).
- Positioning the hearing impaired person in the quietest corner of the room away from a crowd.
- Use lined or insulated drapes, carpet and other sound absorbing materials.
- Closed captioning for TV.
- Texting!

Losses that Impact Our Ability to Live Safely in our Homes

III. Dexterity Limiting Conditions

- For people with arthritis or other dexterity limiting condition, operating controls and switches, gripping objects such as door knobs and using tools and utensils are the chief problems.

Tips to Compensate for Loss of Dexterity

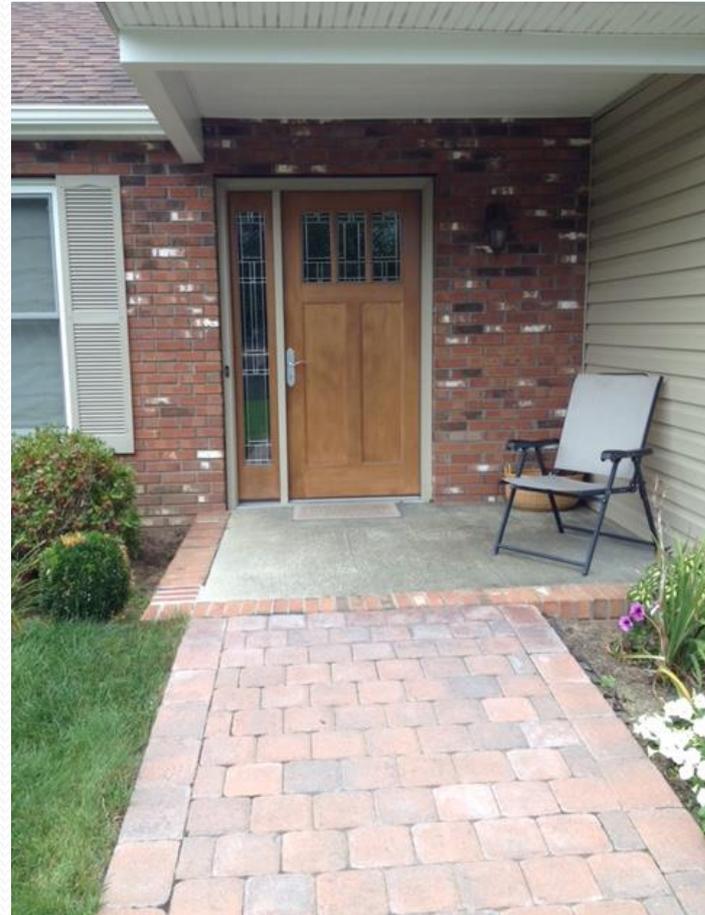


Walk Through of House

II. Entrances and Exits

- Threshold flat
- Steps in good repair
- Secure railings on both sides
- Door knobs and locks – lever
- Peek windows - see visitors before letting them in
- Lighting - well lit entry
- Clutter- remove and clear pathways
- Doormats-check the bottom

Zero Threshold



Extended Rail



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Stairs Too Wide



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Put Rail Down the Middle



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Walk Through of House

II. General Living Areas

- Walking pathways uncluttered
- Windows/door open easily
- Accessible light switches
- Electrical cords secured
- Outlets 18-24 inches up from floor
- Furniture - captain's chairs, risers, lift chairs
- Phone – Large push buttons, speed dial emergency contacts, portable phone or cell

Living Room

- Be sure you can easily get on and off furniture - the higher the piece and the firmer the cushion the easier to manage - 20 inches high ideal
- Furniture risers can help immensely
- Ensure clear pathways between furniture
- For dementia pts remove all unnecessary furniture
- Is the coffee table too close to the couch?
- Be careful of throw rugs - large heavy rugs are fine if edges not frayed

Try the Shrager Twist Test!

Living Room



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Seating Options



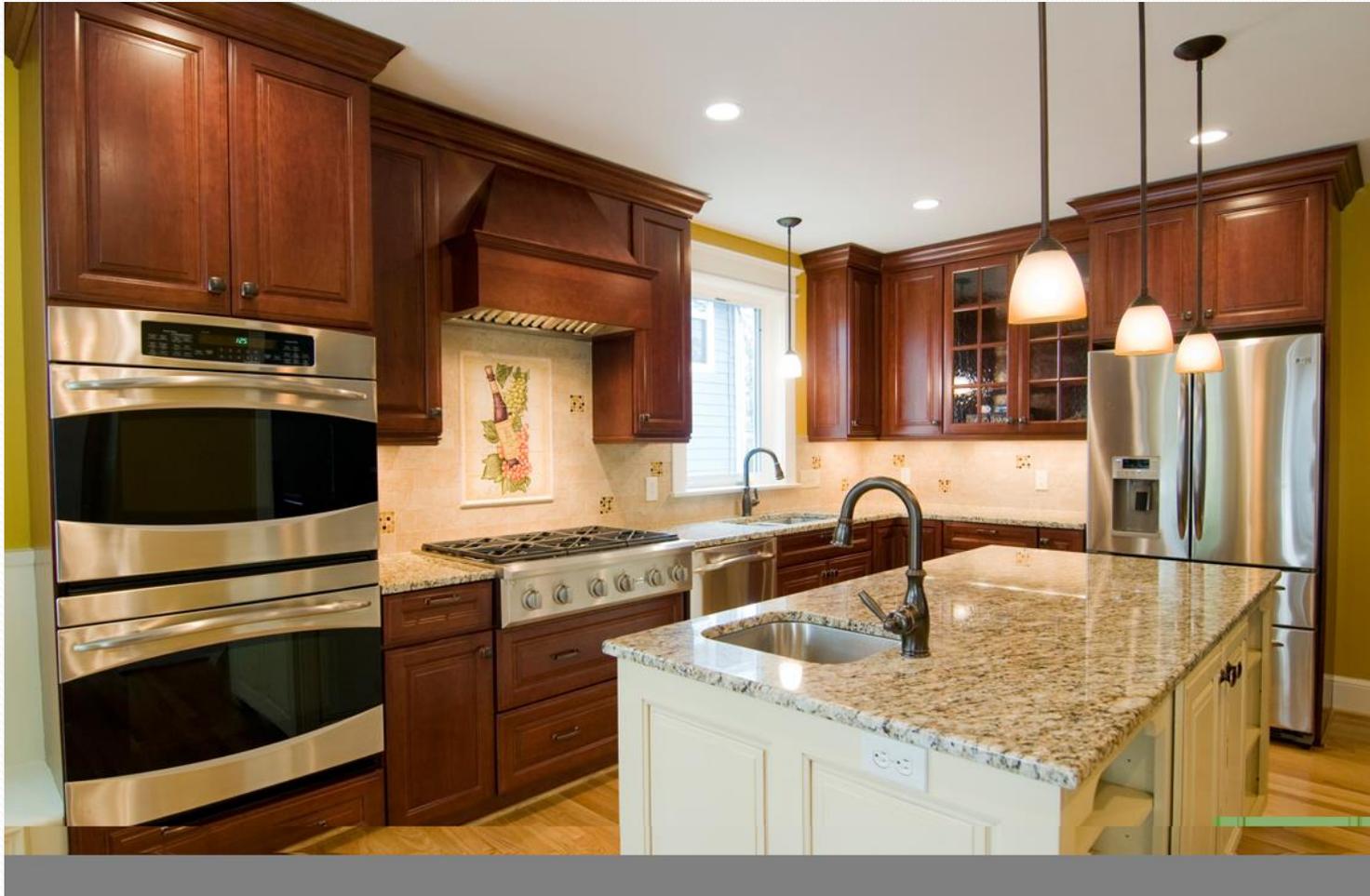
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Walk Through of House

III. Kitchen

- Single lever faucets
- Refrigerator and freezer doors easily accessed - French doors with bottom freezer, side-by side for wheelchair users
- Height of cabinets - consider pull down or re-organizing contents
- Adequate workspace with counters 36 inches high
- Stove door easily reached - knobs for burners in the front or on the side
- Transporting food - rolling cart, Rollator walker
- Pull out drawer or counter space under microwave

Universal Design Kitchen



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Organize for Easy Access



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Pull Down Shelves

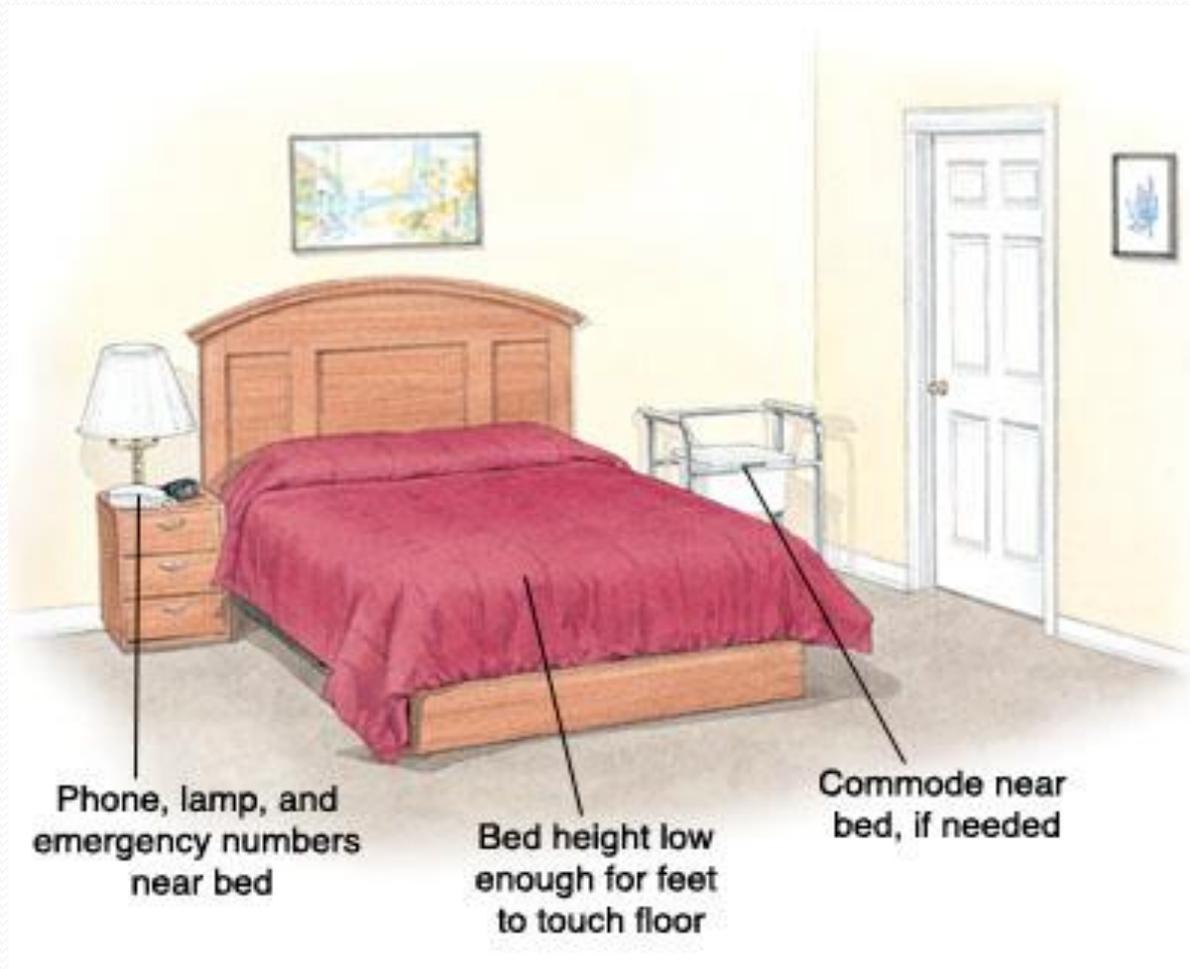


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Walk Through of House

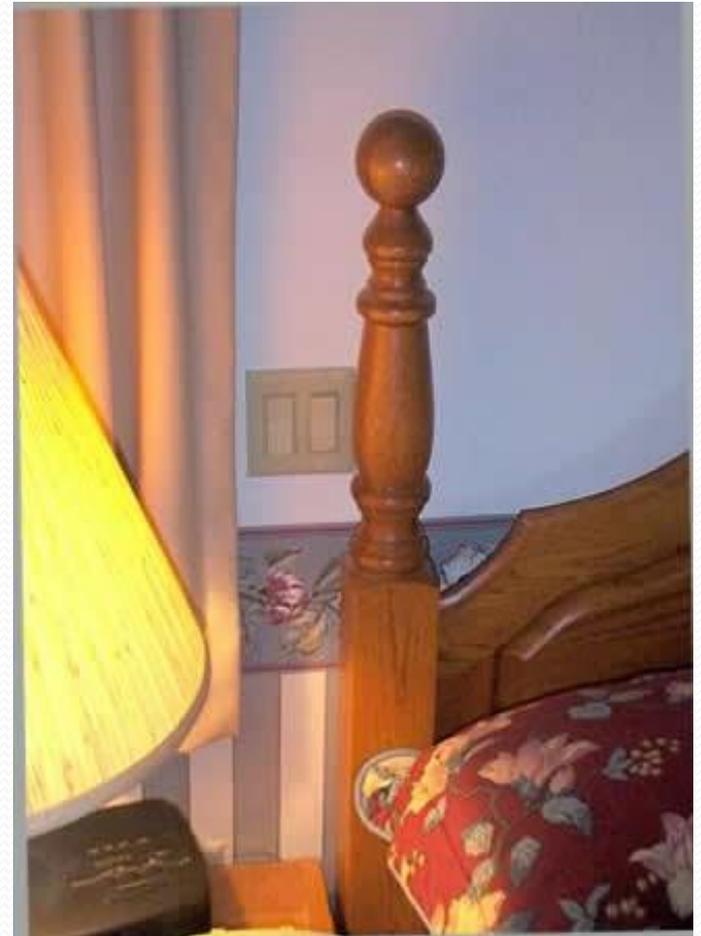
IV. Bedroom

- Is the door way accessible for a wheelchair or walker (32-36 inches wide)?
- Can one get in and out of bed easily? (Top of mattress 22 inches from floor)
- Is there a light easily reachable from the bed?
- Is the phone next to the bed?
- Can clothing be easily reached in the closet?
- Is there a clear path to the bathroom?
- Is there a night light in bedroom/bathroom? Use automatic lights for dementia patient in all rooms and hallways



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Bedroom Modifications



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Walk Through of House

V. Bathroom

- Is the doorway accessible for walker or wheelchair? 32-36 Inches wide ideal
- Can shower/tub be easily accessed?
- Are there grab bars?
- Are bath mats safe?
- Toilet height - best height is 17-19 inches high – consider various types of raised seats
- Sinks -27-30 inches clearance under for chair
- Single lever faucet for visual indicator and easier to manipulate
- Rugs - **Shrager twist test**

Accessible Bathroom



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Bathroom Adaptations



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Shower Chairs



Keep The Water In



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Raised Toilet Seats



Versa Frame



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Good Use of Space



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Grab Bars



Bar Opposite Toilet Provides Leverage



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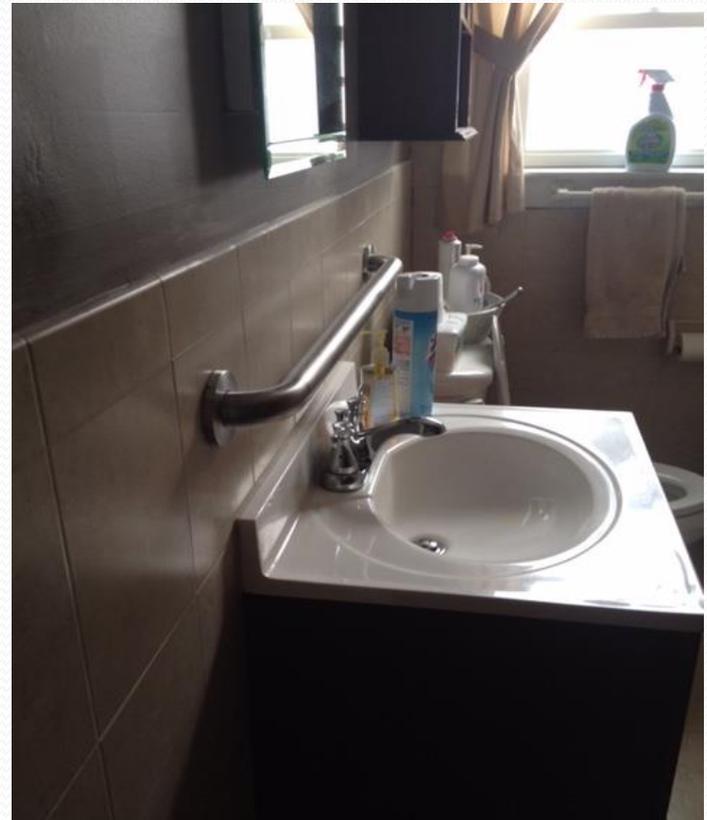
Combination Grab Bars



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Grab Bars

Not Just for Showers



Grab Bars - Not Just for Bathrooms



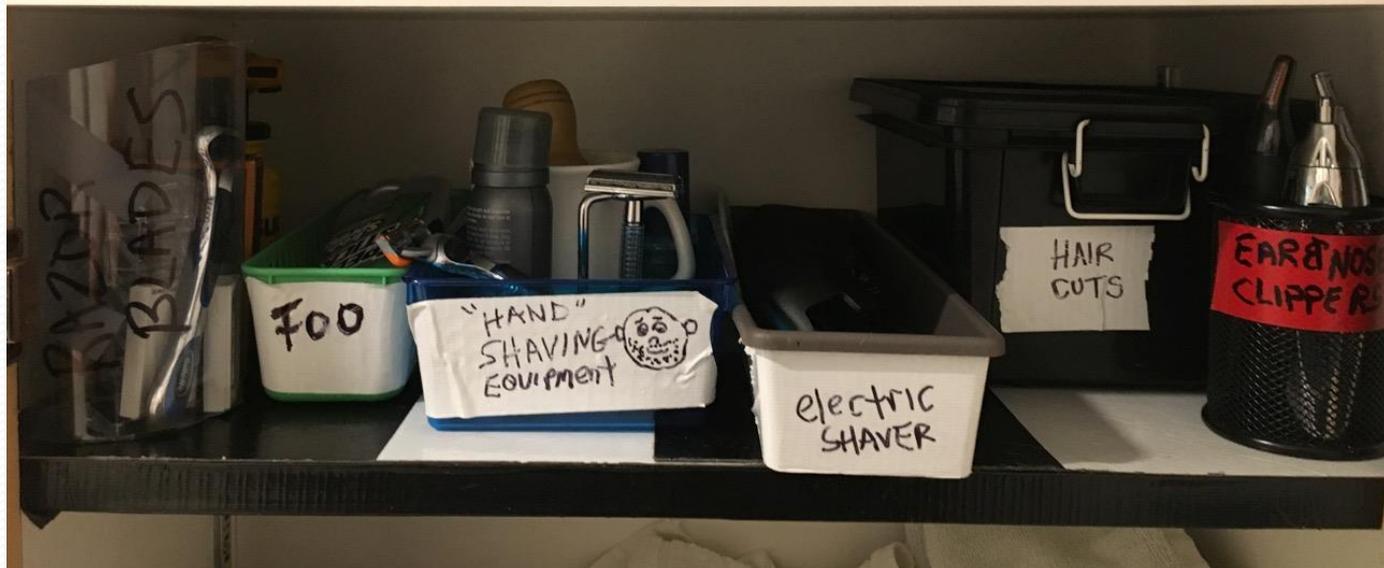
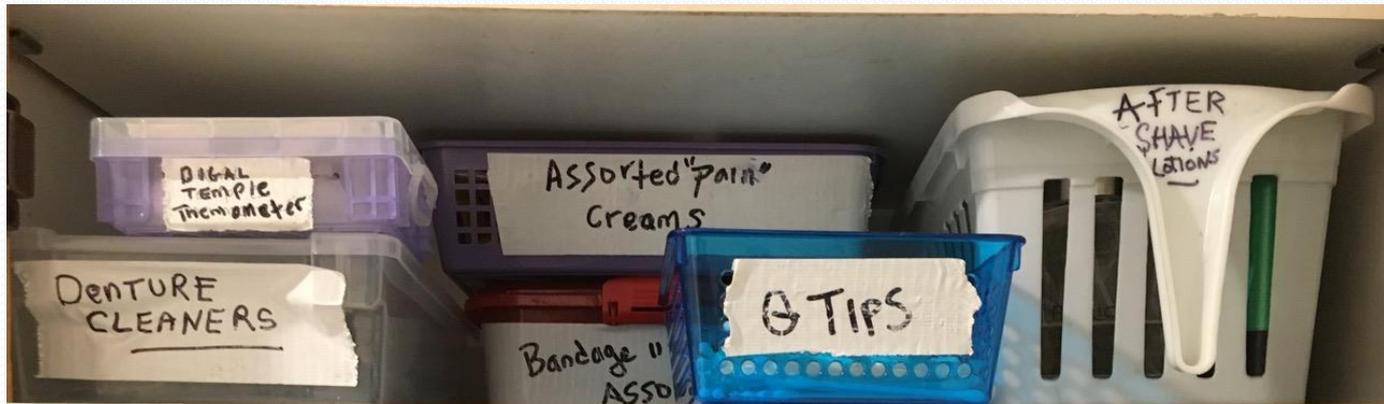
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Bars and Rails Everywhere!

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Label for Visual Prompt



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Walk Through of House

VI. Stairs

- Stairs are often a necessary evil but we can make them safe.

Treads and Risers

- Inside risers should not be more than 6-7 inches
- Outside risers maximum height of 4 inches
- Tread should be wide enough so that foot can rest completely on it
- Open risers (in the back) can be tripping hazard

Stairs



- Always keep objects off the stairs
- Fix loose or uneven steps
- Install railing on both sides if appropriate
- Fix loose railings or put in new ones and extend past top and bottom step
- Have a light switch and fixture at both the top and bottom of the stairs (there are switches that glow)
- Consider painting a contrasting color on the top edge of the steps or using non skid tape

Extend the Rails



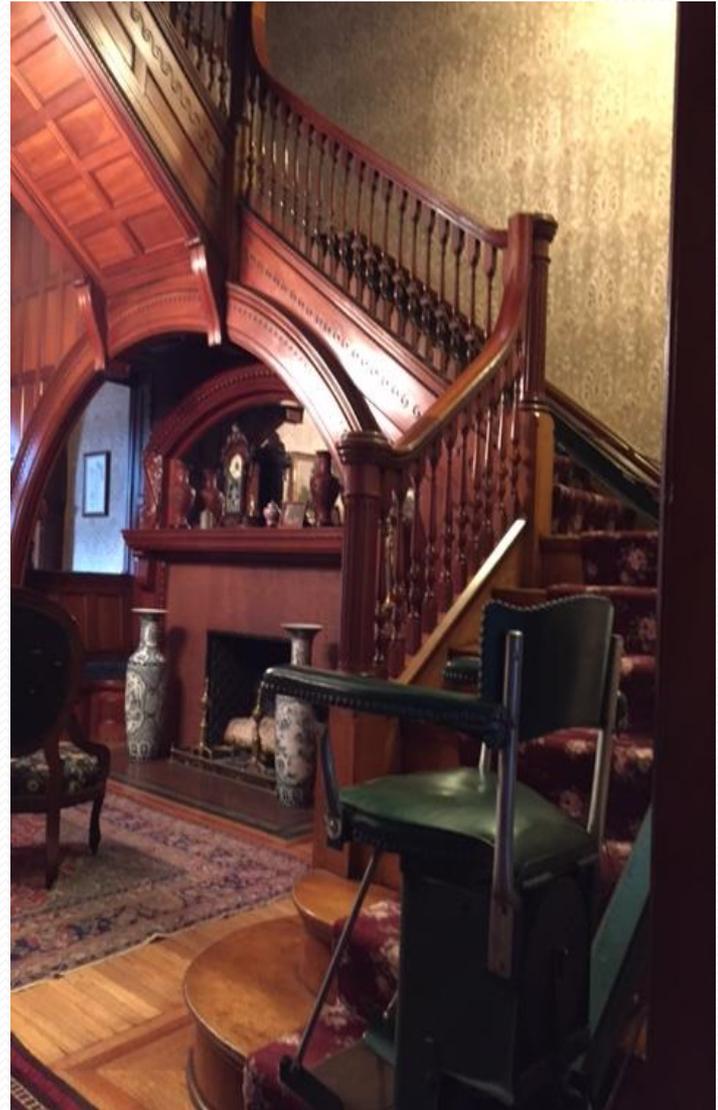
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Stair Lifts



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Oldest Working Stairlift in Existence - 1890



Walk Through of House

VII. Doorways

- Should be minimum of 32 inches wide to accommodate a standard wheelchair which is generally 24 - 27 inches wide
- If door in typical hallway and wheelchair must turn in doorway needs to be 36 inches wide
- Option to expand doorway using expandable offset hinges that add about 2 inches of additional space
- Remove door stop behind the door
- Remove door completely and put up a curtain

Doorway Modifications



Dowel Tucked Away



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Safe Steps to Basement



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Garage Steps



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Garage Steps



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Grab Handle



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Lock on Sliding Glass Door



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Questions ???



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