

# Too Close for Comfort?



## Comfort and Safety

### Senior-Friendly Homes

Most people don't think about the hazards a typical home can hold for an older adult, but the dangers can become frighteningly evident after a senior moves in.

Adult children who move a senior into their homes, or who choose to move into a senior's home, should ensure that the living space is safe.

Dan Bawden is a local remodeling contractor and the founder of the Certified Aging in Place Specialists (CAPS) program for the National Association of Home Builders. He owns Legal Eagle Contractors, Co. in Houston, a firm that specializes in accessible construction and universal design. He offers some concerns for bringing your senior loved one into your home, along with affordable and easy fixes. (Prices are "typical" but may vary somewhat by geographical area.)

Concerns and Fixes			
<b>Security</b>	Osteoporosis changes the height of some seniors, making it difficult for them to look through a door's peephole.	<b>The Fix</b>	Add an additional, lower peephole to your front door at a cost of about \$40.
<b>Glare</b>	Glare from windows in a living or family room also can be a problem for seniors, whose eyes are more sensitive.	<b>The Fix</b>	Mini, micro or Venetian blinds can be purchased for as low as \$35 to \$50 and installed for about \$35.
<b>Inadequate Storage</b>	Wonder what to do with all of your elderly loved one's possessions when they move in with you?	<b>The Fix</b>	Turn your attic into a storeroom for your senior's possessions by installing 3/4 inch plywood sheets to your attic floor beams. Use screws, not nails, so they can be removed to get to wiring and plumbing in the future. Cost for a 150 square foot storage platform: \$900.
<b>Falls</b>	Seniors may be vulnerable to falls, particularly on or near stairs.	<b>The Fix</b>	Remove area rugs on and near the top and bottom of stairs. Make sure railings are on <i>both sides</i> of the stairs. Cost to add railings on one side: between \$200 and \$300.
<b>Lighting</b>	Macular Degeneration and other eye issues can make older adults susceptible to vision problems.	<b>The Fix</b>	Recessed lighting -- four lights placed about four feet from the corners of the ceiling -- provides excellent bedroom light for older adults. Cost installed: about \$150 per light fixture or \$600 for a bedroom. Remodeling using contrasting colors (e.g. on stairs) can help with depth perception.

<b>Tripping</b>	Changes in floor height between a hallway and bedroom door entry can be a tripping hazard.	<b>The Fix</b>	A wood transition strip can be installed to even out the difference. Cost? About \$100.
<b>Burns</b>	Older adults with mobility issues can be vulnerable to cooking accidents.	<b>The Fix</b>	Ovens on the market now open from the side, making it easier for someone in a wheelchair or with a walker. Cost: between \$800 and \$1,000.
<b>Scalding</b>	Hot water from older faucets and valves in the shower and tub could scald a senior with neuropathy. Too cold and it can startle a senior, leading to a fall or other injury.	<b>The Fix</b>	A device in newer faucets controls the temperature and equalizes pressure when someone is showering and another family member flushes the toilet. Cost to replace older faucets and valves: about \$500. Add another \$500 if tile work and repairs are needed.
<b>Slick Surfaces</b>	Bathrooms are the most dangerous rooms in the house because of slick surfaces that can contribute to falls.	<b>The Fix</b>	Install grab bars. Very attractive decorative grab bars are available at home improvement stores for about \$50-\$75 each. Cost to install, including the bar, about \$200.
<b>Arthritis</b>	Older adults with arthritis often cannot open round door knobs.	<b>The Fix</b>	Put lever handles on interior doors and in and out of the house. If you don't want to replace the entire door knob, lever door knob adapters cost around \$20 and can be purchased at online specialty equipment companies.
<b>Entry Hazards</b>	Seniors coming to the front door with groceries or other packages may be at risk of dropping their merchandise or, even worse, falling.	<b>The Fix</b>	Family members or a contractor can construct a shelf on the outside of the house on which to set keys and packages. Shelves and brackets can be purchased at home improvement stores. Cost for materials and installation, \$75.
<b>Kitchen Faucet</b>	Navigating a kitchen faucet and separate spray hose can be difficult for some seniors.	<b>The Fix</b>	Kitchen faucets may be replaced with an all-in-one faucet and spray hose for easier use. A soap dispenser can then be placed in the hole that once held the spray hose. Cost for the improvement, about \$350.
<b>Kitchen Tasks</b>	Kneading bread and other kitchen tasks that might require sitting are more difficult for seniors in wheelchairs.	<b>The Fix</b>	A rolling island can be safer and more convenient. Cost: about \$500.

<b>Carpets</b>	Thick family room carpet can be a safety hazard for some seniors.	<b>The Fix</b>	A low-pile commercial grade carpet is cheaper than conventional carpet, is easier to keep clean and safer for walkers and wheelchairs. Cost: about \$20 per square yard; half the cost of regular carpet and pad.
<b>Doors</b>	Hinged closet doors may be more difficult for seniors to navigate around and take up more space.	<b>The Fix</b>	Replace hinged closet doors with bi-fold doors that fold back onto the wall for full access, and add a light to the closet; for an estimated cost of \$500.
<b>911 Emergency</b>	Could your senior loved one get help fast in an emergency if he or she were home alone?	<b>The Fix</b>	A telephone is available that prompts the numbers plaque on your house to flash when a caller dials 911 so the ambulance can more easily locate the house. Cost: about \$450.
<p>For more information about these products and solutions, visit Dan Bawden, CAPS at <a href="http://www.legaleaglecontractors.com">www.legaleaglecontractors.com</a></p>			