


Want to skip the retirement home? Here's how you can age in your home safely

By [Tracey O'Shaughnessy](#), Staff Writer

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 Gift Article



A caregiver pushing a senior woman in a wheelchair on a city sidewalk in a residential neighborhood. The caregiver is the senior's adult daughter. Family and friends are a significant source of support as people age.

Courtesy of kali9/Getty Images

When Roy Walzer's father began to fail physically, the Goshen resident knew he had to start tinkering.

Although his parents lived in a one-level home, Walzer worried about his father's balance. His formerly robust dad had lost strength in his early 80s. "So we started with grab bars," Walzer said. In the shower. Next to the toilet. Walzer bought a hospital bed and a recliner for his father to allow him to rise from sitting to a near-standing.



The renovated bathroom with aging in place features for a senior couple on Thursday, March 12, 2026, in Simsbury. Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

Walzer retrofitted the house and hired personal care aides so his father could realize the goal that 75% of Americans share, according to a recent [AARP survey](#): age in their own homes.

More than 66% of Americans own their own homes, according to [USA Facts](#). Overall, 46% of adults age 65 and older have taken steps to “age in place,” according to the [Institute for Health Care Policy and Innovation at the University of Michigan](#). Homeowners remodeling to age in place are now the fastest-growing niche group of remodelers, accounting for 41.2% of top new revenue sources, according to the [Farnsworth Group](#).

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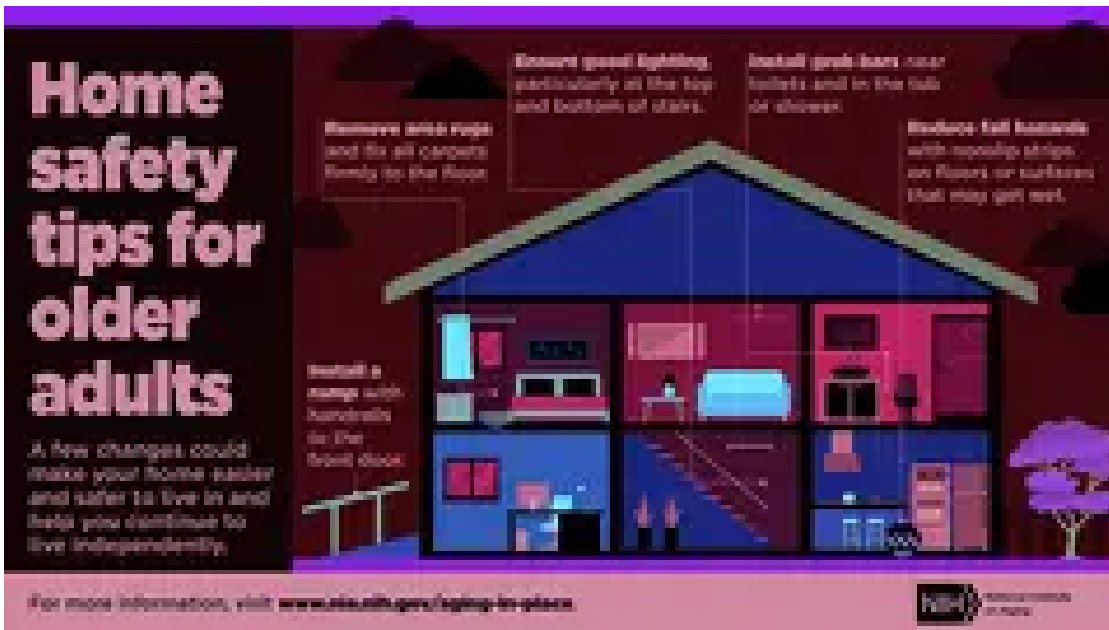
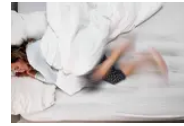
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This infographic from the National Institute of Aging includes some items homeowners should consider if they want to age in place. Courtesy of National Institute on Aging

[Nora Duncan](#), AARP Connecticut state director, doesn't blame people who prefer to stay in familiar settings. "People should be relentless about living in a home," she said, adding, "It doesn't necessarily have to be the one you've lived in for 30 years."



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Aging at home can require remodeling, but it can also entail a mindset readjustment, said [Yale's Dr. Maura Singh](#), assistant professor of medicine.

"Regular interactions with friends or family provide opportunities for physical activity and mental engagement and can promote emotional well-being," [she said via Yale Medicine](#). "Virtual connections through phone calls, video chats or other shared activities can help maintain a sense of community and purpose."



The bathroom is typically one of the most dangerous places in the house. Eighty percent of falls among seniors happen there, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Grab bars, color contrasts and textured floor and tub services can help, contractors say. Courtesy of Dan Bawden

"We like to call it [universal design](#)," said Jonathan Gordon, of [Design by the Jonathans](#). That means that the house "should be able to translate for anyone's use," he said. "We might ask, 'Can you operate this faucet with a closed fist?' 'Can we use these beautiful faucets without having round knobs?' It should not look institutional. It should look beautiful."

"Years ago, we were in a pattern: You fall down, you get hurt, you come back into your house six months later and (realize), it really isn't that safe," said [Alan Hanbury](#), retired president of [Hanbury Builders](#). Today, he said, "the term 'aging in place' has been almost mainstream."

Resources to help homeowners 'age in place'

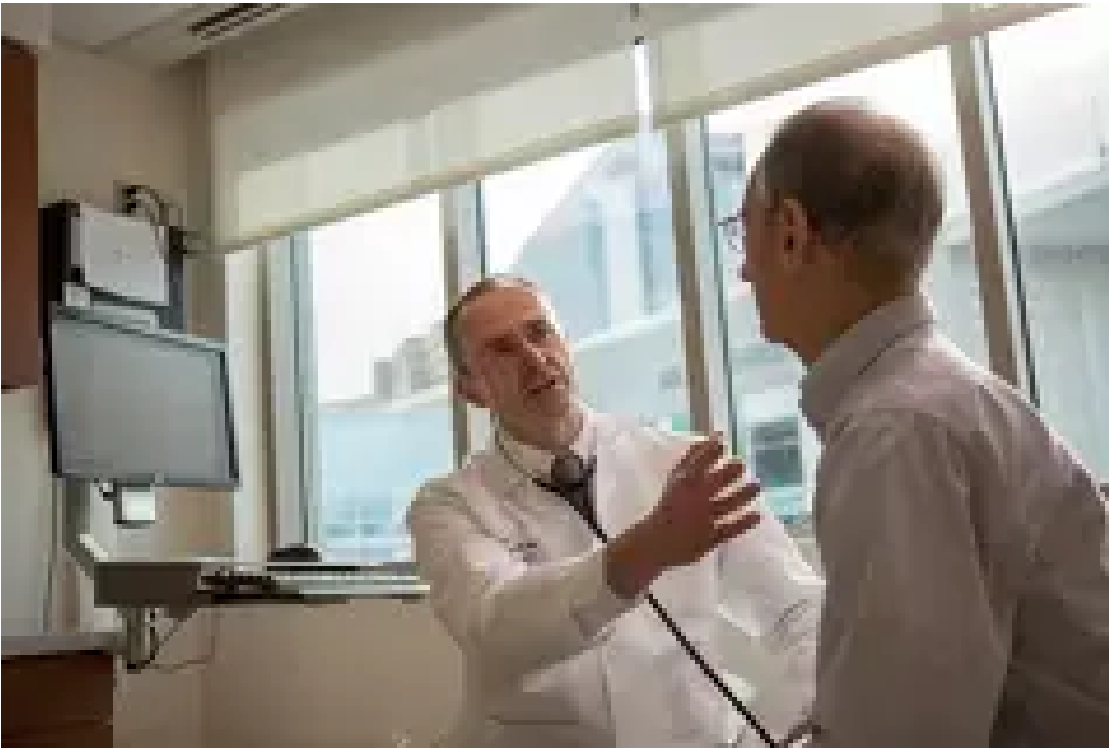
The National Association of Builders provides a [Remodeling Checklist](#) to help homeowners plan.

Additionally, The National Institute of Aging (NIA) provides a [Home Safety Checklist](#) to help identify and remove hazards around the house, noting that repairs or alterations could change with age. Among the questions are:

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The cost of housing has increased nearly 50% between 2019 to 2024, according to [Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies](#). That has meant those between 65 to 89 are moving less, according to the [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston](#).

Although familiarity of one's home can be fortifying, according to a study in the [Delaware Journal of Public Health](#), they may not always be the safest places for homeowners, particularly if they have or develop [chronic conditions](#), doctors say. [Dr. Patrick Coll](#), a geriatric physician at UConn Health, said the most important move to stay in one's house is to engage in physical exercise with a focus on [strength training](#), particularly as people age.



Dr. Patrick Coll, a family medicine physician in the UConn Center on Aging, stresses the importance of physical fitness for those who want to age in their own homes.

Courtesy of Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo

"For my patients who may already be having some issues with mobility, I do impress upon them the benefits of physical exercise and particularly resistance training and muscle strengthening exercises to maintain function and independence," he said.

In many ways, Walzer was fortunate. His father was able to stay in his house until his death at 88, with the assistance of aides, Walzer said. "We couldn't have done it without that," he said.



The renovated bathroom with aging in place features for a senior couple on Thursday, March 12, 2026, in Simsbury.
Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

Typically, contractors look at a house for barriers and fall risks, starting at the garage or driveway, Hanbury said. Eliminating steps, adding outside lighting, hand railings, a monitored doorbell system and peep hole are safety practices many overlook, he said. "It's pretty easy to fall even when it's perfect daylight," Hanbury said. "You need to have some way to light that hallway." He said hallways are second only to bathrooms as the place household accidents are most likely.



Among the changes people should consider in order to age in their home safely are removing area rugs and trip hazards, according to AARP.

Courtesy of AnnaStills/Getty Images

Non-slip flooring, lever handles and doors that swing out instead of in are critical for those who want to age in place, he said.

"What you need to be thinking about is what does the house have to look like to be able to age in place," said Duncan. "There's some things you just have to think through, like how would an arthritic hand open a can or turn a knob?"



Towel holders that double as grab bars have become more stylish than they were decades ago, builders say. This is an Invisia bar towel holder.
Courtesy of David Bawden

The cost to make these renovations can run from \$3,000 to \$75,000 or more, Bawden and Hanbury say, partly because designers have developed more stylish alternatives to the more institutional-looking steel handles and grab bars. "It used to be the only thing that was available was those big clunky-looking, stainless steel ones like the ones you see in a hospital bathroom, but now there is a whole universe of beautiful hardware out there that is thinner, nicer, decorative hardware," Bawden said.

That includes towel bars that double as grab bars or corner shelves and toilet paper holders that are also grab bars, Bawden said. Shower heads equipped with LED lights with colors that match the temperature of the water can be helpful for those with neuropathy, as can lowering the temperature of the water, Bawden said.



Jonathan Gordon in the renovated bathroom with aging in place features for a senior couple on Thursday, March 12, 2026, in Simsbury. Jim Michaud/Hearst Connecticut Media

While the cost of aging in place may seem high, the yearly cost of a semi-private room in a [long-term care facility](#) in Connecticut in 2024 was \$186,300, reports the [Connecticut Partnership for Long Term Care](#). "You can put an addition on the back of your house with a big, walk-in closet, a bathroom and decent-sized bedroom for the same amount of money it costs you to end up in a nursing home for one year," said Hanbury.

Duncan is a fan of "[Smart Homes](#)," which can control devices from TVs to doorbells and from lights to medication and security systems. "It can be game-changing for people," she said. "It can be the difference between having someone stay home or go into a nursing facility." Family members are able to check whether a parent left a stove on, took their medication or are in bed, said Duncan. They can also illuminate the bedroom or hallway when a parent's feet hit the floor.

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Tracey O'Shaughnessy is a features reporter for CT Insider. A Pulitzer Prize-nominee, she is a two-time recipient of the Sigma Delta Chi award from the Society of Professional Journalists. A native of Lexington, Mass, she is a graduate of Wesleyan and American universities who has won more than 11 national first place awards for art criticism from the Society for Features Journalism, four Wilbur Awards for her columns on religion, a Missouri Lifestyle Award for her features, and several New England Newspaper Association Awards for her columns.