

Adapt To Aging

Adapt to Aging by “Future Proofing”
by Leni Stevenson

Older seniors are most likely to remain independent in their homes if they have successfully arranged their homes and lives to maximize the physical and practical changes associated with aging. Since no one has the proverbial “crystal ball” to avoid with foreknowledge all mishaps, preventative measures the only practical option. Below are some concerns to address when “future proofing” your home and lives to best maintain independent living.

Fall prevention and safety upgrades: Falls are the leading cause for hospitalizations. One's risk of falling increases with age, medication use, and medical conditions. Injuries from falls are a leading reason older adults are forced to leave their homes. A home safety upgrade to help reduce injuries is the installation of bathroom grab bars. TSC has volunteer handymen who can make your home safer by installing grab bars or additional handrails. If you are a registered TSC client and would like grab bars installed, call 687-3330 to place your request.

Good lighting is also very important to fall prevention. . An 85-year-old needs about three times as much light as a 15-year-old to see the same thing. Consider replacing incandescent or CFLs bulbs with Energy Star LED that last 25,000 hours and produce more light with less watt usage.. By decreasing bulb replacement frequency, the potential of a fall from a ladder is greatly reduced. With that in mind, it may be prudent to hire someone or have a younger family member get on the ladder to change bulbs, replace smoke detector batteries, etc. Also consider the risk of falls when using CFL bulbs. Although they are cheapest to purchase, the long delay during warm up possibly puts older seniors because of insufficient light and more frequent bulb replacement. Halogen bulbs, although bright, are very hot and could increase fire risks. The investment in the most current lightening with the most lumens, most efficient energy consumption, and longest life (100, 000 hours) will entail the services of a licensed electrician to make the upgrades. It is a wise investment in safety and worth consideration.

Taking a balance classes to lesson fall risk is another means to “future proof”. Rebecca Janecek teaches “A Matter of Balance” in Teller County. Her class, free to those 60 and older, addresses concerns about falling with practical solutions and includes balance exercises to improve balance. Call Rebecca at 964-0908 for registration information.

One Story Floor Plan: Plan for unexpected events that would limit your physical mobility. Think ahead about how you can convert to all-on-one-floor living. For example, you may need to remodel or add a full bath on the ground level. Modifications should be thoughtfully completed before a crisis arises.

Accessible Utilities: You may not have problems with door handles, turning faucets, or retrieving clothes from a top-loading washing machine now, but your independence hinges on

performing these activities in your home. Familiarize yourself with Universal Design (UD). It is the design of products and environments that are usable by most people, regardless of their level of ability or disability. UD brings together the principles of accessible design (meeting standards for handicapped access, using "adaptable" design, meaning "normal"-looking design that can be revised later for disabled use. UD is also called "lifespan design." Really take a look at your house and determine, could you manage if you needed a walker or a wheelchair. If possible, make modifications before a crisis hits.

Emergency Alerts: A wide range of emergency-alert systems and [medical alert systems](#) are on the market. Locally, Christine Faughn at Prospect Home Care and Hospice is a source of Personal Emergency Response System (PERS unit) information. Seniors may be eligible by functional need to receive a PERS unit at no cost. Contact Christine at 687-0549 to discuss your PERS unit eligibility and information on other aids such as medication minders.

Keeping the county emergency management office aware of your level of need for assistance in case of an emergency is another future proofing step. Call TSC to request a Teller County Emergency Assistance and Response Program (EARP) form.

Automated Bill Pay and Other Transactions: Switching over to automated financial systems will eliminate your need to go out and do banking in person. Automated deposits and mail order pharmacies are helpful as well. The more aspects of life that can be managed electronically or delivered to your door, the less you will have to rely on others, enhancing your odds of independent living.

Outsourced Home Maintenance: **Someone will need to tend the lawn, clean the gutters, shovel snow, and so on. Think through how you'll make this happen and whether you can afford to outsource this work to outside companies or individual contractors.**

Transportation Options: Some 90-somethings are still on the road, but that does not mean that all should be. Giving up the car keys is often delayed because independent living hinges on having access to the essentials of grocery shopping, medical appointments, bank, pharmacy, etc. Will you be able to count on family or friends to transport you always? If your support network is of limited availability, the TSC transportation program may be your lynchpin to remaining independent. If you are 60 years old, you are eligible for TSC transportation services. So, for young seniors who only need transport for an occasional outpatient medical procedure, TSC is an assurance that medical needs do not go unmet. Maintaining health by getting periodic screenings should not be put at risk because one doesn't want to impose on someone for a ride. TSC can be your support network for transportation to medical appointments and other essential errands.