

Safety at Home

Aging in Place with Parkinson's



Written By: Connie Luu, Occupational Therapist

As Parkinson's progresses along with normal aging, it is common to start wondering how long you can stay safely and independently in your current home. While there is the option to downsize or look at moving into a supported living facility, there are many reasons why one may wish to stay in their home. These include familiarity with the community, proximity to supports (family, medical care, amenities), financial reasons and more. In this article, we will discuss some ways to make your home safer, allowing you to age in place.

General recommendations

- » **Ensure walking paths are clear and clutter free.**
 - Remove throw rugs or secure with double-sided rug tape.
 - Make sure cords and cables are well managed.
- » **Check for adequate lighting throughout the home.**
 - Pay special attention to high-risk areas - e.g., stairs, pathway from bedroom to bathroom, entrances and exits.
 - Use rocker instead of toggle switches, or better yet, motion activated.
- » **Wear supportive shoes with a non-slip sole and flat or low heel.**
- » **Increase colour contrast.**
 - Put coloured tape/paint on steps and stairs to help with depth perception.
 - Use bright colours to highlight light switches, grab bars, door handles.
- » **Choose uniform flooring with high slip resistance.**
 - Changes in surface can increase incidence of freezing - if unable to change floor, try placing a strip of tape on either side to act as visual cue
- » **Change knobs (doors, faucets, drawers) to lever handles or any other style of handle that is large and easy to grip.**

Timing

Another common question regarding home modifications is "when?" That will depend on your Parkinson's progression, type of home you live in, financial resources, and many other factors. Often, there is hesitation to make changes to the home when you are young or have not progressed to a certain stage yet, but it is always better to be proactive than reactive. In other words, make changes in your home today to prevent falls in the future, rather than after a fall and all the detrimental consequences that follow has already occurred. Many of these recommendations are not Parkinson's specific and can benefit others living in as well as visitors to your home.

Common problem areas

Do you have trouble...	Possible solutions
Getting in and out of bed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Adjust bed height by replacing mattress/box spring or using furniture raisers. » Use satin bed sheets (e.g., Comfort Linen) or wear satin pajamas to reduce friction. » Install bed rail, transfer pole or overhead trapeze.
Going up and down the stairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Put anti-slip treads on each step. » Install handrails on both sides. » Install stair lift or alternative stair assistants (e.g., AssiStep). » Move bedroom and bathroom to main floor to reduce need to go upstairs.
Using the toilet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Raise toilet seat height - either by replacing toilet, or adding a raised toilet seat » Toilet safety frame. » Use a bidet or toilet wiping aid to help with wiping. » If getting up to use the bathroom frequently during the night is an issue, consider a bedside commode.
Getting in and out of the shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Install grab bars - wall mounted or tub clamp-on are preferred over suction. <i>Shower rods or towel racks are not designed to support human weight!</i> » Put non-slip mat or anti-slip treads inside tub. » Sit to shower on a shower chair, or for those with more significant balance issues a transfer tub bench. » Lower bathtub threshold by using a bathtub cut-out conversion kit. » Replace bathtub with a walk-in shower.



Funding

Making these changes to your home can be quite costly. Here are some funding programs through the government that you may be eligible for:

- » **Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL)**
<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-aids-to-daily-living.aspx>
- » **Home Accessibility Tax Credit**
<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/line-31285-home-accessibility-expenses.html>
- » **Residential Access Modification Program (RAMP)**
<https://www.alberta.ca/residential-access-modification-program.aspx>
- » **Seniors Home Adaptation and Repair Program (SHARP)**
<https://www.alberta.ca/seniors-home-adaptation-repair-program.aspx>

For help applying for funding or determining what modifications or equipment are best suited for you in your home, contact Alberta Health Services - Continuing Care Access or your Client Service Coordinator to get connected with an Occupational Therapist.