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Grey Matters

The safety makeover checklist



Madam See Tho had fixtures fitted in her home to make it more accessible for her.

-- CAROLINE CHIA

HOW TO GET HELP

If you have a frail, elderly person and would like to make safer changes to your home, get in touch with an occupational therapist.

These professionals are trained to help patients go about their routines of daily living - from getting down from a bed to going to the toilet - and will be able to advise you on how to modify your living spaces. Even troubleshoot for needs, given that the patient's condition may deteriorate.

In fact, the occupational therapist can advise also on contractors who have experience in supplying and installing such fittings.

Post-renovation, the therapist will train caregivers and the elderly on how to use the new fittings properly.

Talk to the nurse at the hospital where your elderly family member is receiving geriatric care. Or, call Touch at 6352-1622.

The agency is also running a fall prevention programme. Among other things, it will cover the risks of falling and tailor prevention strategies that are right for the elderly patient. Call 6258 6797 or e-mail caregivers@touch.org.sg

For wheelchair-users

- Ramps: Allows the wheelchair to be wheeled over kerbs and steps like those at the doorway to bathrooms and at the front doors of HDB flats
- Grab bars: At strategic places such as in toilets and next to the bed
- Right-height furniture: Waist-high instead of near-ceiling shelves, for example, so the patient can reach a mug or clothes from the wheelchair
- Kitchen cabinets: Stove tops and kitchen counters that are lower than normal

For unsteady walkers

- Grab bars: Especially in the toilet and bathroom
- Non-slip floors: Change to non-slip tiles or chemically treat floors to make them less slippery
- Furniture layout: Move unstable pieces of furniture, such as light tables and chairs, away from areas which the elderly frequent
- Steps: With deteriorating vision, the elderly may not be able to make out the edges of steps. Paste a brightly coloured strip on the edge

General safety tips

- **Furniture-raisers:** Seniors find it tough lowering themselves onto and getting up from a seat that is below knee-height. A cheap and simple change is to use furniture-raisers to increase the height of chairs and beds. Buy them from department stores
- **Lighting:** As eyes age, the elderly also take longer to adjust to different light conditions, so make sure the home is evenly lit. Install extra lights Cannot distribute vertically where necessary. And locate light switches where they can reach them from the wheelchair
- **Purchases:** When buying things like grab bars, do not simply pick one from a hardware store. It may be nothing more than a towel rack, which will not be able to withstand the weight of a person pressing down on it.