


# PARKINSON'S HOME SAFETY TIPS

We frequently ask people with Parkinson's, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and care partners what the most instrumental changes people with Parkinson's can make to their home. We have gathered that information and created this checklist as a great starting point to help make your home a great place to live comfortably and safely with Parkinson's.


## General Safety Guidelines

*Implement these updates everywhere in the house.*

- Decrease clutter. Place furniture so that you have wide walkways and can move around easily. Decreasing clutter in your physical space not only reduces tripping hazards but can also reduce freezing and mental clutter, allowing for greater focus and calm.
- Decrease visual clutter to minimize confusion.
- Install lever handle door knobs instead of circular knobs for easier opening.
- Install grab bars throughout your home. (If possible, seek advice from an occupational therapist (OT) on proper placement first.)
- Make sure chairs in the house are stable (not on wheels), have arm rests, and are the adequate seat height to make standing up and sitting down easier. (Your feet should be able to touch the floor and your legs and hips at about a 90-degree angle so you can stand easily.) Avoid purchasing sofas and arm chairs that are soft and low as they are difficult to get up from.
- If using a wheelchair or walker, always lock brakes after each use.
- Arrange your furniture to avoid multiple turns or maneuvers so you can easily access areas you use. These are the places where you are most likely to fall.
- Be sure a communication system is in place and easily accessible in every room and hallway that you use. (This could be a phone, alarm button, or medical alert necklace or bracelet.) This is important for people who are in the later stages of Parkinson's.
- Consider a doorbell that offers a camera view so you can see who is at the door.
- Give two to three trusted individuals keys to your home in case you need them to come by and let each of them know who is on your trusted list. Compile their contact information and share with each person if they're comfortable with that. Or use a lockbox and key, garage door remote code, or a smart lock so you can offer people easy access to your home.

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- Place the File of Life ([folife.org](https://folife.org)) notice outside your house and the information on the side of your refrigerator so that first responders can access it quickly and respect your wishes.
  - Consider in-home exercise equipment for exercise solutions in bad weather. Exercise can improve gait, movement, and mental capacity throughout the day—even short bouts of 10-15 minutes can be helpful. A yoga mat or other foam pad for floor exercises is a great option.
  - If you exercise at home, make sure you have plenty of space to do your exercises.
  - Request a visit from a physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) who knows the ins and out of Parkinson's or other neurological conditions to address your needs and offer solutions.
  - Use voice activated music devices (Alexa, Google Home, etc.) to assist with ungluing from a freeze. (Be sure to test the device to ensure it recognizes your voice.)
  - Be sure to remove or lock up all guns or other dangerous items so they are out of easy reach if you experience hallucinations or delusions.
  - Use smaller versions of standard items, such as narrow or small laundry baskets or a laundry basket to reduce floor or feet visibility issues when walking and carrying items.

### **Lighting & Electrical Outlets**

- Place lights so they are easily accessible.
  - Make sure hallways and stairways are well-lit and use extra lighting to reduce shadows on steps.
  - Use contrasting colors on light switch plates or get lighted switch plates to make finding switches easy in the dark.
  - Use red lights at night to minimize sleep disruption.
  - Put night lights in hallways between bedrooms and bathrooms. (Add motion sensor lights in these areas if possible.)
  - Get lamps that you can turn on with one touch or with sound.
  - If possible, install all electrical outlets about waist high so you don't have to bend down to access them.
  - Put all electrical, extension and telephone cords out of the flow of foot traffic to reduce tripping hazards.
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### **EVERY VICTORY COUNTS**

## Floors


- Consider installing hardwood flooring and tile throughout your house. If you redo your floors, consider flooring that includes horizontal lines or contrasting grout colors to help with freezing.
- Reduce or remove area rugs. (Any rugs used should be non-slip, rubber-backed, with a low pile that lies flat to the floor. Also, use adhesive liquid rug backing or tack down rugs to floor.)
- Change the paint color in rooms to lighter colors. It can give the illusion of more space and assist with freezing.
- Eliminate abrupt changes in surfaces (i.e. carpet to hardwood) because they can be a tripping hazard.

## Entryway & Stairs


- Install light switches (or motion sensors) at the top and bottom of the stairs and at every entryway.
- Put a piece of easy-to-see tape at the edge of each step to help with depth perception.
- Ensure there are handrails on both sides of all stairways (or areas with multiple steps) that run the full length of the stairs. Cueing may be needed to use the railing consistently.
- Avoid distractions such as carrying on a conversation or carrying multiple objects while going up or down the stairs. Always keep one hand free to use the rail.
- Use painter's tape to mark proper foot placement for routine tasks or to guide foot placement through doorways and around corners that might otherwise cause freezing.
- Add a seat or bench to the home entrance area to be able to rest or place items when entering the home.

## Bedrooms

- Make sure you can touch your feet to the floor when seated on your bed to make it easier to get in and out.
- Consider installing a side rail, a bedcane, a sturdy bedside table or a rope above the bed to assist with rolling and getting up. (You could also get a transfer pole professionally installed next to the bed.)

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- Put a bedside commode or handheld urinal next to the bed. This is ideal if you struggle to move easily upon waking. (For men, consider a condom catheter if nighttime movement is not easy.)
  - Always have a bottle of water at the bedside to assist in lowering your blood pressure in the morning if needed.
  - Securely place blocks, bricks, or other objects under the bed to slightly elevate the head of the bed and decrease the angle necessary to get out of the bed. This potentially decreases large drops in blood pressure with change in position from supine to sitting if you have neurogenic orthostatic hypotension (nOH).
  - If you have REM Sleep Behavior Disorder (RBD), reduce safety hazards (secure bedside lamps, lock up any weapons, remove clutter) in case you act your dreams out at night or fall out of bed. (Consider sleeping in separate beds.)
  - Consider putting a motion sensor in the bedroom with an alarm or light activation to alert your spouse if you get up in the middle of the night.
  - Consider a video or audio monitor if you sleep in separate bedrooms or a voice-activated intercom device.
  - Consider using a satin sheet for your bottom sheet to make it easier to roll over.
  - Make the bed with loose and light sheets that can be taken off or layered depending on the temperature. (No heating blankets.) Or, just use a light down comforter instead of sheets and blankets to reduce the chance of getting caught up in multiple sheets.
  - Place a flashlight in the nightstand or within easy reach in case your power goes out.
  - Keep a telephone within easy reach of the bed. It can serve as a flashlight, too.

## **Bathrooms**

- Install grab bars near the toilet, tub and in the shower. (If possible, get help from a PT or OT on proper placement.) (Be sure if you do it yourself, you must install it into a stud. Getting a professional to do it is best.)
  - Ensure your toilet is at comfort height to make it easier to get up and down. (You can get a riser if you don't want to replace your toilet.)
  - Professionally install a stable, purpose-made seat or bench in your shower.
  - Make sure all bathtubs, showers floors, and exits from the shower are non-slip. (Use aqua socks in public showers.) Use alternatives such as non-slip strips applied to floors or tubs to replace suction cup bath mats.
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## **EVERY VICTORY COUNTS**

- Install faucets that turn on and off with one touch or are motion-sensored.
- Make sure water temperature is consistent and not too hot. You can set your water heater for the home to a specific maximum setting.
- Install handheld shower heads when possible to use while seated in the shower.
- Make sure there is a phone or life alert button within easy reach of the shower, tub and toilet in case of an emergency. (Better yet, consider using a waterproof med alert device such as Revolar in the shower or tub.)

### **Kitchen**

- Install faucets that turn on and off with one touch and can do hot/cold with one hand.
- Consider appliances that automatically turn off after a certain length of time in case you forget.
- Put frequently used items in easy to access locations so you don't have to bend or reach to get them. (No step stools or ladders!)
- Create prep stations with all of the supplies for a task within easy reach of the work space (i.e., a coffee station).
- Consider trading your ceramic and glass dishes for those made with melamine, a more durable substance that rarely breaks when dropped.
- Change cabinet knobs to large easy-to-grip handles.
- Swap out large trash cans for smaller ones or ones with wheels to make it easier to take out the trash.
- Try "flicking fingers" periodically to help with tremor when performing kitchen tasks and eating.
- Purchase convenience foods that are pre-cut and washed to save time and limit the need to use sharp knives.
- Make opening jars easier by using a one-touch automatic jar opener.
- Use non-slip rubber matting to stabilize cutting boards, mixing bowls, dinnerware, or adaptive kitchen equipment.