

# Newsletter For Mature Adults



## Prepare for Aging at Home. Start Now.

One result of the pandemic is the deep-thinking people have done about how they want to age. More are committed to aging at home, given what happened to residents in long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 crisis.

But people need to start doing more to plan for aging in place successfully, suggests the National Poll on Healthy Aging (<https://bit.ly/3MwvABb>). The poll is based at the U-M Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation and supported by AARP and Michigan Medicine, the University of Michigan's academic medical center.

Frequently, people delay making aging-in-place upgrades and only do so after they have faced an emergency. But unfortunately, that is often too late.

The poll's researchers note that people even in their fifties, and certainly those in their 60s and 70s, need to do more planning and home modifications if they want to age in place.

Though 88% of respondents said aging in place is important to them, just 15% reported that they had given a lot of consideration to the modifications needed to remain at home, and 21% said they had not given any consideration.

Thirty-four percent of those aged 50–80 said their home has the necessary features for aging in place, 47% said it does, and 19% said it does not.

Those between 50 and 64 were more likely than those aged 65–80 to say their home did not have the necessary features (24% vs. 13%).

The most common accessibility features older adults reported having at home:

- A main floor bathroom (88%) and bedroom (78%)
- Door frames wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair (54%)
- Home entrances with ramps or no stairs (19%)
- Lever-style door handles (32%)
- Bathroom features, including shower chairs or benches (36%), raised-height toilet seats (36%), grab bars (32%), and barrier-free showers (7%)

- Smart technologies, including voice-controlled assistive devices (21%), smart thermostats (18%), and doorbell cameras (16%).

Safety devices also contribute to aging in place more easily, but fewer than 10% of older adults reported that their homes were equipped with smart stove alarms, bath temperature monitors, water leak detectors, smart medication pillboxes, and/or emergency response systems.

Relationships – social support and assistance – matter for successful aging. Those include family, friends, and neighbors; community groups for socializing, exercising, and activities; and paid caregivers to help with household chores, grocery shopping, and personal care.

The poll found that 28% of older adults lived alone, and among all older adults, more than half (58%) said they were very satisfied with their relationships with those close to them.

When asked about social interactions over the last year, 77% said they had had contact at least once a week with friends, family, or neighbors who were not living with them.

However, those with a disability or chronic health condition that limits activities were less likely than those without disabilities to have had contact with others outside their household at least weekly (68%). They also were less likely to be very satisfied with their current social life (22% vs. 39%).

Most older adults said they have someone who could help with grocery shopping (84%), household chores (80%), and managing their finances (79%), and 67% said they had someone who could help with personal care. However, those who live alone were more likely to say that they do not have someone to help with personal care compared with those who live with someone (48% vs. 27%).

Here are some to-dos to plan for aging at home:

- Assess your living situation, identify the home upgrades you will need, and make those modifications.
- Consider installing smart home devices that will help you simplify tasks or allow family members and friends to support you from a distance.
- Forge stronger social bonds to stave off isolation and build a support network.

- Explore community-based programs that offer supportive services for older adults and people with disabilities. Some may be low cost, covered by insurance, or available on a sliding scale basis.

## **Feeling the bite of inflation?**

With rising food and gas prices and inflation in every part of our lives, you may be feeling financially pinched and fearful that you cannot afford some of the basics.

If you are facing trouble, check out BenefitsCheckUp (<https://bit.ly/3viJcKk>), a free service by the National Council on Aging that matches you with benefit programs. The site includes over 2,500 such programs.

One focus is housing, and BenefitsCheckUp can identify groups that may help you locate and pay for affordable housing or keep your home, make critical home repairs, and provide payment assistance with utility bills.

Among the programs are:

- HUD and Section 8 Housing Programs
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization
- Reverse Mortgage Counseling
- Foreclosure Prevention & Assistance

Other housing-related assistance includes tax relief programs that help cover your home's property taxes. For instance, you may discover that you are eligible for benefits like homestead exemptions, rebates, credits, deductions, and deferrals.

Paying for prescriptions is another cost that takes a massive bite out of everyone's budget. If you are having trouble affording your medication, learn about the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' Limited Income Newly Eligible Transition (LINET) Program. LINET provides immediate, temporary medication access for low-income Medicare beneficiaries who do not have prescription drug coverage (<https://bit.ly/36QGxVs>).

## **Nine Ways to up your home fire safety game**

Remember the fire safety planning and drills from your childhood? Well, they are just as important as we age.

After all, at age 65, people are twice as likely to be killed or injured by fires than the population at large, according to the National Fire Protection Association (<https://bit.ly/3KbJVRW>). By age 75, that risk increases to three times that of the general population and four times by age 85.

NFPA and the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (<https://bit.ly/3KvcMRz>) have teamed up for Home Fire Sprinkler Week (**May 15-21, 2022**) to **get the word out about home fire safety**.

Here are nine tips geared to older adults.

1. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside each bedroom, and outside each sleeping area. Be sure they are interconnected so when one sounds, they all sound. Install carbon monoxide alarms outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. Test the alarms monthly.
2. Look into special alarms like strobe lights and bed shakers if you have hearing challenges.
3. Plan your escape. Identify two ways out of every room and two ways out of your home.
4. Make sure windows and doors open easily. If you have security bars on your doors or windows, be sure they have emergency releases inside so you can open them easily. Also, ensure that windows are not sealed shut with paint or nails.
5. Be aware of your abilities and the assistive devices you need to get out of your house quickly. That means keeping your glasses, wheelchair, walker, scooter, or cane near your bed.
6. Have a landline telephone or cell phone and charger near your bed, so you can call for help if you are trapped.
7. Keep a flashlight and whistle near your bed to signal for help.
8. Subscribe to a medical alert system that lets you push a button to have emergency help sent.
9. Consider installing sprinklers. Learn more at the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition (<https://bit.ly/3xRzdO3>).

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