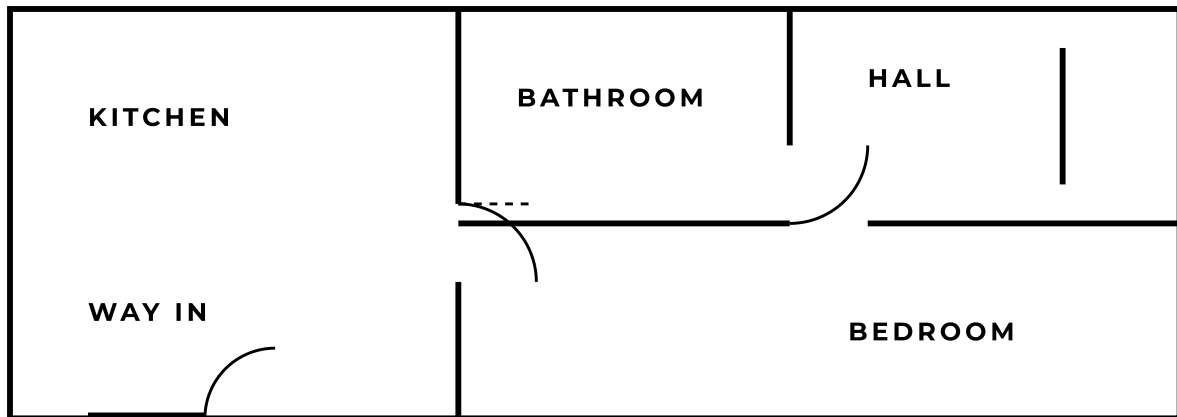


WE GET BETTER WITH AGE



A WE GET BETTER WITH AGE GUIDE

A HOUSE THAT FITS

*The practical aging-in-place guide: small changes you
can actually make for an easier life at home*

BEFORE YOU BEGIN — A FEW PLAIN WORDS

This guide is about fitting your home to the body you have now: small changes, what to look for when you buy, and who does the work. Before you turn the page, here is what it is and what it is not.

This is general information, not medical advice. If your balance, your strength, your eyesight or your hearing has changed, that is a conversation for your doctor. A change at home can help alongside medical care. It is never a replacement for it. An occupational therapist can also look at your home with you, and in many places that visit is covered; chapter eleven says how to ask.

It is not a building inspection either. The measurements in these pages come from the federal accessibility standard, which is law for public buildings, not for private homes. They are used here as the best free guidance available. Your own walls, floors and wiring are for a professional to judge on site.

Electrical work, plumbing and anything structural go to a licensed professional. Every chapter names which jobs those are. And anything that holds your weight has to be fixed into the structure of the wall — a handle held on by suction cups is not a grab bar, and chapter five explains why.

If something hurts, stop. Nothing in this guide is worth an injury, and almost every change in it has a version somebody else can install for you.

Programs and prices change. Grant amounts, eligibility rules and product listings were checked in September 2026. Before you apply for anything or buy anything, check the current details at the source.

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START WITH ONE ROOM

If one room is the whole problem, start there. Here is where everything about it lives. The first chapter listed is the main one.

THE BATHROOM

→ chapters 5, 4 and 3 *Grab bars, a shower seat, a hand-held shower, the floor and the threshold; the route to it at night; the faucet and the door handle.*

The bedroom → chapters 4, 3 and 9
Light that comes on by itself, a clear floor, what to keep within reach of the bed; the switch and the door; a quiet fan for the hot nights.

THE KITCHEN

→ chapters 6, 3 and 9 *The top shelf, the back of the low cabinet, heavy pans, carrying, light on the counter, somewhere to sit; the faucet, the pulls and the lids; a shelf you could live off for two weeks.*

The front door and the way in → chapters 7, 3 and 8
The step at the door, the handrail, the threshold; the key and the lock; a landing place for everything you carry in.

THE STAIRS

→ chapters 7 and 12 *A handrail on both sides, steps you can see; and checking them every season.*

The hallway → chapters 4 and 3 *Low light for the night; a switch you can find in the dark.*

OUTSIDE, THE PATH, AND THE CAR

→ chapters 7 and 12 *The outside steps, the path, the ice, getting in and out of the car; and the autumn list.*

And the moments that are not a room

- The night, bed to bathroom →
chapter 4 - Keys, papers and
medication → chapter 8 - The flu, the
heat wave, the day the power goes out
→ chapter 9 - Living alone, and who
knows you're all right → chapter 10 -
What any of it costs, and who helps pay
→ chapter 11 - Keeping all of it working
→ chapter 12

INTRODUCTION

Fitting the house to the body you have now

Somebody sent you a link. Or the doctor's office handed you a folded pamphlet on the way out, or you looked it up yourself one evening after a conversation you did not enjoy.

However it arrived, you have read one of these before — and there is no shortage of them. Hospitals publish them. Insurers publish them. So do the companies that sell the grab bars.

Ten hazards in your home. A photograph of a rug with a curled corner. A bathtub shot from above, lit like a crime scene. Somewhere in the middle, a statistic about falls, and under it a sentence explaining what happens to people who wait.

You got to the end and you did not feel informed. You felt watched.

They are all built the same way

Name the danger. Attach the consequence. Leave you to fill in the rest at two in the morning.

It works, in the narrow sense that it sells grab bars. What it does to you is less useful. You end up frightened enough to feel bad about the rug and not clear enough to do anything specific about it — and fear that has nowhere to go turns into avoidance. The subject becomes unpleasant. You stop opening the emails.

So perhaps you bought the mat. Perhaps you meant to and the week got away from you. Either way, some weeks later the worry was still there and the house was exactly the same.

I am not going to do that to you.

My mother refused every one of these changes for months

She had no argument with the idea. What she refused were the objects. Lever handles would make her look old. A brighter hallway meant admitting something, and she suspected that once she started admitting things there would be no clear place to stop.

That is not stubbornness. It is what fear-shaped advice produces: every change turns into a small confession, so the safest move is to change nothing and hope.

Then she let me swap the handles and the switches. Afterward she said this:

"I didn't realize how much energy I was spending just trying to turn on a faucet or open a door. Now I can save that energy for things I actually want to do."

She had been paying that for years without ever seeing the bill. And what she was paying for was not carelessness, or age, or anything she had done wrong. It was the gap between the house she had and the hands she had now.

Your body has changed. It has not failed.

It changed at twenty and it changed at forty — and you adjusted both times without calling it decline. This is another one of those, and it comes with its own set of facts.

Jar lids are harder than they were. A dark hallway takes longer to resolve into a hallway when you walk into it from a bright kitchen. Your balance catches itself more slowly when something surprises it. A low chair asks more of you on the way up than it used to. Small print has moved further away.

None of those is a hazard. They are measurements — the working dimensions of the body you have now. And a house can be fitted to the body living in it. That is the whole of what this book does.

Room by room, object by object — what to look for, what it costs, who does the work, and what to check before you buy. No chapter tells you what will happen to you if you skip it.

What this book will not do

It will not frighten you into anything. Where something carries a risk, you get the risk in one sentence and then the fix, in the same paragraph. They travel together.

It will not turn your home into a hospital room. Nearly every change in here has a version that looks like furniture. Where one exists only in white plastic, I say so, and I say what it buys you, so the trade is yours to make.

It will not ask you to renovate. Most of this is one object out and a better object in. A few jobs need a contractor for an afternoon. The handful that need building work are marked — and they sit at the end of their chapters rather than the front.

It is not written for your children. They are welcome to read it. It was not built to talk you into anything on their behalf — and where somebody else has opinions about where you should live, there is a short box called *If someone says you should move* whose job is to hand you the sentence, not to help them make their case.

The fitting: notice, alter, keep

Three moves. They fit on a card, and the card is the last page of the kit.

NOTICE. Where you hesitate, lean, detour, or put something off. Not the places a checklist calls hazardous — the places your own day costs more than it should. Chapter two is a slow walk through the house doing nothing but this.

ALTER. The one change that gives it back. One object, one afternoon — an alteration, not a renovation.

KEEP. What makes it last — who installs it, what you check, when you look again. This is the part the other books leave out, and it is how a grab bar ends up holding towels.

How to use it

Chapter one asks whether you should stay in this house at all. It is the question underneath all the others — and the one chapter where the answer might be no.

After that comes the house itself. What your hands touch all day. The twenty seconds between bed and bathroom at night. The bathroom, the kitchen, the way in and the way out. Then the rest of it: where things live so the house remembers for you, how to set up for a bad day instead of an average one, living alone on purpose, what it costs and who helps pay wherever you happen to live, and how to keep all of it working as the years move.

You do not have to read it in order. If one room is the whole problem, the page after the contents tells you which chapters cover which room. Start there and leave the rest until you want it.

The sheets at the back are meant to be printed and written on. They are the working half of this book, and each chapter tells you when one of them is about to earn its keep.

Three things before you start

This is not medical advice. If your balance has changed, if standing up makes the room move, if your knees or your eyes are doing something new — that is a conversation with your doctor, and

no lamp substitutes for it. Where a change at home helps with something medical, it helps alongside the doctor. Never instead.

If something hurts, stop. Nothing in here is worth an injury — and most of these changes have a version somebody else can install.

Electrical work and plumbing go to a professional. Wiring a switch, moving a light, anything behind a wall or inside a pipe. Every chapter names which jobs those are, so you are never guessing halfway through one.

About the product links

They are there so you can see what a thing looks like and what features to compare — a starting point for your own looking, not a verdict. Buy the equivalent at a store in your own town if that suits you better; the chapter tells you what to check either way. If you do use one of the links, I may earn a small commission, at no extra cost to you.

The dollar signs beside each product are the price of the thing itself, before anybody installs it. **\$** is under thirty dollars, **\$\$** is thirty to a hundred and fifty, and **\$\$\$** is more than a hundred and fifty. They were checked in September 2026, and prices move — read them as a size, not a quote.

1

DECIDING

CHAPTER ONE

SHOULD YOU STAY?

The question before all the others

Your son calls on a Sunday. Somewhere in the middle of the call, between the weather and the grandchildren, he says he has been looking at places near him. Nice ones. Just looking.

You hear yourself say *I'm fine*.

Then you hang up, and you stand in your own kitchen, and for the first time in thirty years you look at it the way someone else might. The step down into the living room. The cabinet above the stove you stopped using in spring. The bath mat you keep meaning to replace.

You walked past all three of them today without thinking about any of them.

Now they are evidence.

Staying gets called independence. Moving gets called decline.

Those two labels arrive before anyone has looked at a floor plan or asked a doctor a single question, and they do a great deal of the deciding.

They also make the guilt run in both directions.

If you want to stay, you think about the people who will worry — the ones who will drive across town, who will lie awake imagining. You wonder whether staying is a kind of selfishness, whether the life you want to keep is costing someone else something you have never added up.

If you have started picturing somewhere else — meals you did not cook, people nearby without arranging it, a building where someone else worries about the roof — you feel as though you have given something up before the conversation even started. As though the wanting itself were a confession.

Set both of those down before you try to think clearly. They will fog everything that comes after.

My aunt spent two years inside the wrong question

She lived alone in her apartment for seven years after my uncle died. She had decorated it herself. It held thirty years of their life together, and she knew it the way you know a room in the dark.

She stayed because it was her home, which is a sound reason on its own. She also stayed, I think, because leaving would have meant admitting something she was not ready to admit. The two reasons were braided together, and she never pulled them apart.

She moved in the end — to a community about twenty minutes away, with a strong program and people she came to love. She tells me now that she wishes she had gone two years earlier. Before the isolation set in. Before the winters got long. Before her world had quietly contracted to the size of the apartment.

She did not spend two years making the wrong choice. She spent two years inside the wrong question — *can I stay?* instead of *what do I need, and where can I get it?*

What the research says, and what it does not

Somewhere in this conversation, someone will tell you that staying put protects your mind: that a familiar home keeps you sharper, and that decades of research say so.

I went looking for that research. What is there is thinner and more divided than the claim. Theory did predict that people with memory and thinking problems would take a move harder than everyone else — and when researchers went to check, the results came back inconsistent, which is their word for it. One study of people who had moved into nursing homes and senior apartments found that residents with cognitive impairment were no more vulnerable to the stress of the move than residents without it.

The comfort of a familiar home is worth something. Your routines live there, your objects, your sense of being competent inside your own walls. It is a reason to stay. It is not a medical argument, and anyone who hands it to you as one is selling you something, even if what they are selling is only peace of mind.

Here is what that same study does show. The first year after a move is the hard part, and how a person regards the move matters to how she comes through it. Residents who felt they had moved somewhere worse, and residents who found the move itself stressful, reported more depression and more anxiety than the ones who did not — and that held whatever the state of their memory.

None of that tells you to stay. It tells you that a move is an event with a difficult year attached, and that walking into one knowing that is not the same as being carried into it in March by people making decisions in a corridor.

Which is close to what my aunt has been telling me for years — in her own words, not a journal's: *if you go, go early, and go because you decided to.*

The other side of the ledger is not softer. Social isolation and loneliness are linked to high blood pressure, heart disease, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, dementia, and earlier death. That is how the national institute on aging puts it, and the careful words are theirs: *linked to, associated with.* Not shown to cause.

The same institute lists what raises the risk of becoming isolated in the first place. Part of that list sits well outside anything a house can touch: money, grief, retirement, the friends who moved away or died. The rest of it reads like a table of contents for this book. Losing mobility. Trouble with vision or hearing. Living alone. Having no way to get around. Not being able to leave the house without help.

What you can see, what you can hear, and whether you can get out your own door on your own — a house makes every one of those better or worse. That is the reason this guide does not end with this chapter.

Three questions, in this order

The checklists exist and you will want them eventually. Can you manage the stairs. What a walk-in shower costs. What the insurance covers. Start somewhere else.

1. What does a regular day look like, and where does it happen?

The best day of your life is no use here. A regular one is.

You wake up, you make coffee, and then what? Who is there, or deliberately not there? What do you move toward in the morning? What does the evening ask of you?

Now hold that day up against this house. Does the house help it happen, or does the house make you work for it?

Some regular days have a geography — a particular garden, a kitchen you know by feel, the light through a window you have woken up to for thirty years. Move, and you rebuild something that took decades to build. Other regular days need people within reach, and no amount of work on a kitchen will produce them. Both answers are common. The work is knowing which one is yours before a situation decides it for you.

2. What is the fear underneath the stated fear?

The stated fear is one of three: losing independence, being a burden, being put somewhere. Go one layer down.

When you say independence, do you mean driving? Managing your own medication? Coming and going without anyone tracking it? Or do you mean the quieter thing — knowing where everything is and how everything works, and being competent inside your own walls?

And when you picture moving, what exactly is in the picture? That you disappear into a category? That the particular story of who you are stops being visible to anyone in the room?

The answers point in different directions. A fear of losing say over your own decisions is a reason to read the fine print on how a community is governed — how much the residents decide, and how much of that is written down. A fear of becoming invisible is a reason to care more about who lives there than about the square footage.

Your fear is a map. Read it before you fold it away.

3. What has already changed, and what would the next change cost you?

The changes of the last few years were gradual, which made them easy to absorb and hard to see. So: what has already become harder?

And if one more thing shifted — an illness, a fall, one winter of the kind of quiet that settles in around February — what would that do to your options?

You can answer this while you still have the option of changing your mind. After a fall, it gets answered in a hospital corridor, in one afternoon, by whoever happens to be standing there.

PRINTABLE

PRINTABLE — The Regular Day. One page: the hour, what you are doing, who is there, and a column marked *the house helps / the house makes it harder*. It is the first sheet in the back of this book, and the first time you will use the method the whole guide runs on — **NOTICE**.

What this guide cannot fix

There are answers no amount of hardware reaches.

If the stairs are the only way to your bathroom and your knees have turned that into a daily negotiation, a handrail buys you time. It does not buy you a different floor plan.

If you have stopped seeing people and the house is the reason, no lighting in the world brings them back.

If someone in the house needs care you cannot give, that is a staffing question, not a hardware question.

Staying is not the winning answer. It is one of two reasonable answers, and the rest of this guide is written for the people whose answer is yes — including the ones whose answer is *yes, for now*.

You are not making your home safer

If your answer is yes, the work ahead is not what you think it is.

Safety is the word other people use about you. It is also how a bedroom starts to look like a hospital room: the rail, the raised seat, the beige plastic bought in a hurry by somebody else.

You are making your home take less out of you.

Opening the jar. Finding the light switch in the dark. Getting up out of a chair that sits too low. Reaching for the pan you use every day, on the shelf you can no longer reach easily.

None of those is big enough to notice on its own. By evening you have done thirty of them, and you are tired in a way you cannot point to.

That is what the rest of this book is for. Notice what the house is taking. Alter it, one object at a time. Keep it working.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

When you pictured a regular day, which part of it happened outside this house?

Which part of it needed this house specifically?

If you had to name one room that has quietly gone out of use, which one is it?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

The question is not whether you can stay. It is what you need, and where you can get it.

The guilt runs in both directions. It is not evidence.

Deciding while you still have time is a different decision from deciding after something happens.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, write down one regular day. One page. Nothing else yet.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

You do not have to answer on the call. What you can say is:

"I've been thinking about it too. Give me a few weeks — I'm working through something, and I'll tell you where I land."

It is true, and it moves the conversation onto your calendar instead of his.

2

THE WALK

CHAPTER TWO

THE HESITATION LIST

Where your day costs you more than it should

The first time you try this, you will walk from your front door to your kitchen and see nothing at all.

That is the right result. It means your eyes are doing what they have done for thirty years — editing out everything that has not changed since yesterday. A house you know well is almost invisible to you. It has to be. If you saw every object in it every time you passed, you would never get anywhere.

So this chapter is not about looking harder. It is about looking for something else.

You have already adapted to this house

That is the part worth sitting with, because it explains why the house looks fine.

You take the stairs one at a time now. You did not decide that; it arrived. You carry two smaller loads instead of one big one. You have stopped using the top shelf, and you would have to think for a moment to tell me what is on it. You leave the hall light on at night, and you have a way of coming through the front door — bag down first, then keys — that you worked out years ago without ever saying it out loud.

None of that was a decision. Every one of them was an adjustment, and you made it, quietly, on the house's behalf.

The house has not adjusted to you once.

That is the whole imbalance, and the walk in this chapter is how you find it. You are not hunting for danger. You are looking for the places where **you** have been doing the work that the house should be doing.

The four things to look for

They are small and they are specific, and once you have the four in your head you will start seeing them everywhere.

You hesitate. A half-second pause before you do something. Before the bathtub. Before the bottom step in the dark. Before picking up something heavy. The pause is your body checking whether this is going to go well. It is information, and you have been ignoring it because it is short.

You lean. You put a hand on the wall coming down the hall. You hold the counter while you reach into a low cabinet. You brace against the door frame while you get a shoe on. Notice where your hands go. Your hands already know where the house is not helping.

You detour. You use the other door because the latch on this one sticks. You go around through the dining room. You wash the big pot in the bathtub because the kitchen sink is too shallow to get it under the faucet. Every detour is a small piece of the house you have written off.

You put it off. The light bulb in the hall you have not changed because it means the step stool. The window you stopped opening. The suitcase on top of the closet you would need to ask someone about. Things you postpone once are a schedule. Things you postpone permanently are a decision you never made on purpose.

How to do the walk

Do it at the end of the day, not the beginning. In the morning you are rested and the house feels easy. By six in the evening it has stopped pretending.

Carry something to write on. Not your phone, unless you type quickly — you want to keep moving, and you want your hands free. Paper and a pencil. There is a sheet for this at the back of the book, laid out room by room, with a column for the time of day.

Walk your own day, not the floor plan. Do not start in the attic because it is at the top. Start where you wake up, and go where you actually go: bed, bathroom, kitchen, the chair you sit in, the door you use, the place you do the laundry. The rooms you barely enter can wait, and if a room has quietly gone out of use, write *that* down instead of walking it.

Write what happened, not what it means. *Held the counter to reach the roasting pan.* Not *kitchen unsafe*. The second one is useless a week later; the first one tells you exactly which shelf, and exactly which pan.

Do not fix anything today. This is the one rule with teeth. If you stop to change a bulb you will spend the evening on the bulb and never finish the walk — and the walk is the thing that is hard to repeat. Write it down and keep moving. Nothing on that list is getting worse in the next hour.

What a good line looks like. Six entries from a full-length list, to show the level of detail that is still useful a week later:

- *Front door, coming home, most days — bag on the step, both hands on the key, deadbolt sticks.*
- *Kitchen, every morning — left hand on the counter while reaching the coffee, low shelf.*
- *Hall, after dark — cross it without the light because the switch is at the far end. Every night.*
- *Bathroom, twice daily — hand on the sink getting up. No rail anywhere on that wall.*
- *Laundry, weekly — carry it down in two trips now. Used to be one.*
- *Spare room — have not been in since spring. Do not know why.*

Each of those names a room, a moment, and a body — where you were, when, and what your hands and legs were doing. That is enough for a chapter of this book to answer it.

One pass is enough to start. You will keep adding to it for a week or two after, because now you are seeing them. That is the list working, not the list failing.

Some of it is not a room at all

A few of the costliest things in a house do not sit in any one place. They belong to a moment, and if you walk room by room you will miss all of them.

The twenty seconds at night, between the bed and the bathroom, in the dark, half awake. No floor plan has a room called that, and it is where a great deal goes wrong.

Coming home with your arms full, which is a door, a step, a light and a surface to put things down on, all needing to work in the same fifteen seconds.

Getting up, which happens in a bed, a chair, a tub and a car, and is the same problem four times.

The bad week. A flu, a bad back, the week after a procedure. The house you can manage at your best is not the house you are living in that week, and the walk you do today is done by a well version of you.

Give those a line each on the sheet, under the moment rather than the room. When you reach the chapters, you will find they have chapters of their own — the night has one, the way in and out has one, the bad day has one.

Sorting it, and the counting rule

Most people sort a list like this by how alarming each item sounds. That produces a list where the stairs are at the top and everything else waits forever — and the stairs are exactly the item you are least likely to start on.

Sort by **how many times a day it happens** instead.

A cabinet door that needs two hands, opened eleven times a day, costs you more than a basement step you take twice a month. It is also cheaper to fix, faster to fix, and you will feel the difference before the week is out. Frequency is the measure that matches what the house is charging you, and it is the one that pays you back inside a week.

So, three columns.

This week. High frequency, low cost, no trade needed. The bulb. The mat. The jar opener. The lamp you can carry home in one trip. Expect to be surprised by how many of your items land here.

This month. Needs ordering, measuring, or an afternoon of somebody's time. Lever handles throughout the house. A hand-held shower. Rocker switches in the rooms you use at night.

Someday, and not yet. Real money, or a trade, or a decision you have not made yet. The walk-in shower. The stairlift. The ramp. Writing it here is not deferring it — it is stopping it from blocking the fourteen things you could do on Saturday.

Then take the top item from *this week* and only that one. The rest of this book is arranged by room, so whatever you wrote down, there is a chapter that tells you what to look for, what it costs, and who does the work.

If the page stays empty

Two different things look identical on a blank sheet, and they need opposite responses.

The first is a house that fits. It happens — a single floor, a kitchen someone thought about, doors wide enough because that is how they built them that year. If that is yours, read the chapter on the twenty seconds at night, read the one on the bad day, and put the book on a shelf where you can find it. You are not the reader who needs the rest of it this year.

The second is the walk not working yet, and it has a tell: you finished in under ten minutes and felt faintly relieved. That is the editing again. The house you have known for thirty years is very good at presenting itself as fine.

If that is what happened, try one of these instead of walking again.

Watch your hands for one ordinary hour and write down every surface they touch that is not the thing you were reaching for. Walls, counters, door frames, the back of a chair. Hands are honest before the rest of you is.

Ask what you have stopped doing. Not what is hard — what has quietly left the schedule. The bath you stopped taking. The window box. The friend upstairs you do not visit. Something made each of those stop, and it is usually a step, a reach, a door or a light.

Have somebody else walk it. Not to assess you — to be unfamiliar. A person who has never been in your kitchen will reach for the wrong cabinet, and the wrong cabinet is often the one you gave up on.

What the list is not

It is not a report card on your house, and it is not evidence about you.

A long list means you have lived somewhere a long time and your body has changed since you moved in. Both of those are ordinary. The list is long because you have been compensating well — every item on it is a place where you found a way around something, which is a skill, not a failure.

And it is yours. You do not owe anyone a copy of it. If you want to hand someone a task on Saturday, hand them one line from it, not the page.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Which room did you walk through without writing anything down — and is that because it works, or because you have stopped using it?

Where did your hand go without being asked?

Of everything you wrote, which one did you feel slightly embarrassed to write?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

You have been adapting to this house for years. It has not adapted to you once.

Hesitate, lean,
detour, put off —
four words, and
they will find
almost everything.

Sort by how often it happens, not by how bad it sounds.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

One walk, at the end of one day, with a pencil. Fix nothing while you do it.

PRINTABLE

PRINTABLE — The Hesitation List. One page per floor, laid out by room, with a column for the time of day it happens and a column for how many times. It is the second sheet at the back of the book, and it is the working half of this chapter — the chapter only tells you how to fill it in.



CHAPTER THREE

WHAT YOUR HANDS TOUCH ALL DAY

Switches, handles, faucets, lids

You come back from the store with a bag in each arm. At the door you set one bag down on the step, because the key needs one hand and the round knob needs the other, and the knob will not turn unless you can grip it and twist at the same time.

You have been putting the bag down for about two years.

You never decided to start.

Hands lose the turning before they lose the holding

A round knob asks for two things at once: hold on, and turn. Most of what has become difficult in a house asks for that same pair. The jar lid. The faucet. The key in the lock. The knob on the stove.

You can still hold. The turning is what goes.

What happens next is quiet. You stop buying the pasta sauce in the stiff jar. You wash your hands quickly instead of properly, because the faucet is cold metal and your fingers slip. You leave the hallway light off and walk to the bedroom in the dark, because the switch is small and you know the way.

None of that is a fall. None of it would show up on a safety checklist. It is your day getting smaller by one small thing at a time.

This is also the cheapest chapter in the book. Most of what follows costs less than a pair of shoes, and you touch every one of these things more often than you touch almost anything else you own.

TOGGLE SWITCHES → ROCKER SWITCHES

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A toggle switch is a small lever you pinch between two fingers and flick. In the dark you hunt for it. With cold hands, or a jar in one arm, you put the jar down first.

THE SWAP

A rocker switch is a wide flat panel. You press it with a palm, a knuckle, an elbow, a shoulder. No pinching, no aim, and it is easy to find at night because it is the size of your hand.

WHAT TO BUY

All three are inexpensive. What separates them is how much you want the switch to do for you.

The plain one. ENERLITES single-pole decorator paddle switch, 10-pack . A wide panel where the small lever used to be, and nothing else. It comes ten to a box because once the electrician is in the house, you want every switch done, not one.

If the hallway is dark. Leviton Decora illuminated switch, L5611-2W . The same shape, with a small white light inside it that stays lit when the switch is off, so you can find it without running your hand along the wall. It needs no neutral wire — useful in an older house, where the wall box often does not have one.

If you would rather press nothing at all. Lutron Maestro motion sensor switch, MS-OPS2-WH . The light comes on when you walk in and goes off after you leave. This one also works without a neutral wire, it has a setting that leaves the light off when the room is already bright, and its sensor is built not to switch off on someone sitting still with a book — which is the usual complaint about cheaper ones.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The panel has to be wide enough to press with the back of a closed hand, not a narrow strip you still have to aim at. *ADA-compliant* on the box means it was designed to work without fine grip, and it is the fastest thing to look for. The finish should match what is

already on your walls, or every room will look like it has been modified.

For a motion switch, two things separate the good ones. Ask whether it needs a **neutral wire** — many do, and older wall boxes often do not have one. Both of the switches above are built to work without it, and that is worth checking on the box before you buy rather than after the wall is open. Then ask what it does when you stop moving. A sensor that turns the light off on someone reading quietly is worse than the switch you already have.

SEARCH TERMS

"rocker light switch" · "decorator paddle switch" · "illuminated rocker switch" · "occupancy sensor light switch".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ for the parts. **This one is electrical work — it is a job for an electrician**, and a good one will change every switch in the house in a morning.

WHERE TO START

The bathroom, then the bedroom, then the hallway. Those are the three you reach for in the dark.

TWIST KNOBS → A SINGLE-LEVER FAUCET

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Count the times a faucet is involved in one day — washing hands, filling a glass, rinsing a plate, washing vegetables, cleaning up after. A twist knob wants grip and rotation, and it wants it from wet, soapy fingers. A two-handle faucet wants both hands, which means you cannot be holding a pot.

THE SWAP

A single lever does temperature and flow with one movement. Up and down for the water, left and right for the heat. You can work it with a palm, a wrist, a forearm.

WHAT TO BUY

Three, because the bathroom and the kitchen want different things, and because there is one option that asks nothing of your hands at all.

For the bathroom. Moen Wellton one-handle faucet, 84980SRN **[\$\$]**. One lever for hot, cold and flow, worked with the side of a hand. It is made for a single-hole sink and comes with a plate that covers a three-hole one, so it fits either sink you happen to have — which is the part people get wrong.

For the kitchen. Moen Adler pulldown faucet, 87233SRS **[\$\$\$]**. One lever, a tall arch, and a spray head that pulls down on a hose, so a stockpot fills where it stands and vegetables get rinsed without being lifted into the sink. It comes with the three-hole plate too. It also comes in chrome, for noticeably less money — the finish is the only difference between the two, so check both before you order.

If your hands hurt. OWOFAN touchless pull-down kitchen faucet **[\$\$]**. It starts when you wave a hand underneath, so it asks nothing of your grip at all — no lever, no turning, nothing to hold with wet fingers. It fits one-hole and three-hole sinks like the others, and a small light at the spout changes color with the water temperature, so you can see whether it is hot before you put a hand under it. It runs on batteries or on an adapter, so look under your sink for an outlet before you order.

This is not one of the old names, and it is worth saying why it is here anyway: it has **over twenty-two thousand reviews at 4.5 stars**, which is a far larger body of evidence than most of the familiar brands carry on any single model. A touchless faucet from one of those makers costs several times as much for the same job.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

One lever, not two: two handles means two hands, and two hands means you have put the pot down. A longer lever arm gives more leverage — enough that you can push it down with a forearm while both hands are full. In the kitchen, the pull-down head and the tall arch are what stop you lifting heavy things into the sink. In a store, Moen, Delta and Grohe all make single-lever faucets; ask for one by that name.

And measure before you buy. Sinks are drilled either for one hole or for three, and the faucet has to match the holes you already have. That is the mistake that sends people back to the store with a box under one arm.

On brands you have not heard of. Some of the best value in this book comes from makers with no name recognition at all, and that is fine — but only on evidence. The test is not the logo, it is **how many people have bought it and what they said**: a few thousand reviews holding above four stars is a stronger guarantee than a familiar name with two hundred. What a known brand buys you is a plumber who has the spare parts, and a warranty somebody will still honor in five years. On a fitting with water running through it, that is worth paying for. On a switch screwed to a wall, far less so. Weigh the two against each other per item, rather than deciding once for the whole house.

SEARCH TERMS

"single handle kitchen faucet" · "pull-down kitchen faucet" · "touchless kitchen faucet". In the UK and Ireland, ask for a "single lever mixer tap" — same object, different word.

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$**\$** to **\$****\$****\$** for the faucet. A plumber, an hour or two. **This is not a job to do yourself unless you have done it before** — it involves shutting off the water.

WHERE TO START The kitchen. It is the faucet you touch most.



THE SWAP

ROUND DOORKNOBS → LEVER HANDLES

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

This is the bag on the step. A round knob cannot be opened by anything except a hand that grips and turns — not an elbow, not a wrist, not a full arm.

THE SWAP

A lever goes down under the weight of a forearm. You can open a door with a laundry basket against your chest.

The federal accessibility standard is blunt about this. Hardware has to be operable **with one hand, without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting of the wrist**, and it says in plain words that round door knobs do not comply, *because they require twisting of the wrist*. That standard was written for public buildings. Your house is not required to meet it, and there is no reason the doors you use every day should be worse than the ones at the library.

WHAT TO BUY

Three from one family, so the house matches. All of these are the Kwikset Casey line; the same three shapes exist from Schlage and others if you prefer the look.

For rooms that do not lock — hallways, the kitchen, a bedroom door you leave open. **Kwikset Casey passage lever** . It is reversible, so it fits a door that swings either way.

For the bathroom and bedroom. **Kwikset Casey privacy lever** . It locks from the inside. Before you fit it, confirm the outside has the small hole that opens it in an emergency — it is standard on privacy levers, and it is the one thing you cannot do without. A bathroom door that locks and cannot be opened from outside turns a bad morning into a serious problem.

For the front door. **Kwikset Casey keyed entry lever** . Same shape and finish as the other two, and it can be re-keyed to match the key you already carry, so you are not adding another one to the ring.

If you would rather not buy all three from one maker, the Schlage Accent privacy lever (\$) is the same idea from the other big name — a few dollars more, and rated slightly higher by more people. Schlage and Kwikset levers do not match each other visually, so pick one for the rooms people see and keep it consistent there.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Length is leverage: a longer lever takes less force. Solid metal rather than plastic, because this is the part of the house you use most and plastic levers work loose. Look for *ADA-compliant* on the box, which here means it opens with a closed fist. Check which way your door swings — most levers are reversible, but confirm it rather than assume. And buy a whole floor in one finish and one brand in a single order, or you will end up with three different handles along one hallway.

SEARCH TERMS

"lever door handle" · "ADA lever handle" · "privacy lever with emergency release" · "keyed entry lever set".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

(\$\$) to (\$\$) each. A screwdriver and about half an hour per door if you are comfortable with that; otherwise a handyman does the house in an afternoon.

WHERE TO START

The bathroom door first, because that is the one that has to open from outside. Then the front door. Then the rest, in the order you use them.

CABINET KNOBS → D-SHAPED PULLS

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A small round cabinet knob is a pinch grip, and there are perhaps forty of them in a kitchen. You do not notice them individually. You notice that cooking has become tiring.

THE SWAP

A D-shaped pull is a bar you hook a finger — or four fingers, or a whole hand — behind. No pinch, no aim, and it works with wet hands and with a dish towel.

WHAT TO BUY

Two, from different makers, at opposite ends of what this costs.

Ravinte bar pulls, 10-pack  — five inches long, screws three inches apart, and the cheapest way to do a whole kitchen in one go. Over five thousand reviews holding at 4.7.

Franklin Brass bar pulls, 10-pack  — same three-inch hole spacing, heavier in the hand, and sold in most hardware stores if you would rather see one before buying forty.

Both come ten to a pack, which is roughly one run of drawers. For the heavy lower drawers, the ones with pans in them, buy the longer version of whichever you choose rather than a different style: a longer bar spreads the pull across a whole hand instead of two fingers, and keeping the shape the same stops the kitchen looking patched.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The gap behind the bar matters more than the style: you need room for fingers, not fingertips. Measure the **hole spacing** on what you have now — the distance between the two screws, usually three inches or four — and buy to match, or you are drilling new holes in cabinet doors. If the spacing is odd, there are pulls with adjustable bases. Heavier drawers want longer pulls, so the pull does not become the weak point.

SEARCH TERMS

"cabinet bar pull" · "D-shaped drawer pull" · "3 inch center to center cabinet pull".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ for a set. This one really is a screwdriver job, and it is the one that gets done in a single evening. Do a drawer first and live with it for a day before you buy forty.

WHERE TO START

The drawers you open most: silverware, pans, the one with the dish towels.

THE SWAP

THE KEY AND THE LOCK

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A key is the finest grip in the house — a small metal object, held in two fingers, turned against a spring, usually in poor light, often with your arms full, sometimes in the cold, which makes hands worse.

THE SWAP

Take the grip out of it altogether.

WHAT TO BUY

Two, and they solve the same problem at opposite ends of the budget.

The five-minute version. Dext Keywing key turner **\$**. A molded wing that clips onto the key you already own and gives your fingers something wide to hold and turn. It changes nothing about the door, costs less than lunch, and you can put it on today.

The version that ends the problem. TEEHO TE001 keypad deadbolt **\$\$**. You press a code instead. Nothing to find in a bag, nothing to turn in the cold, and you give a neighbor a code rather than a copy — then change the code afterward if you want to. The buttons light up, it takes a physical key as a backup, and it runs on batteries that warn you well before they die.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Look for a keypad with **backlit buttons** and a real click or beep when a key is pressed, so you know it registered without watching your own fingers. It should still take a physical key as a backup. Check the door thickness against the lock's range before you order, and check that the bolt lines up with the hole already in your door frame — that is the awkward part of the job.

A keypad also ends the thing where a key gets hidden under a mat, which everyone knows about including the people you would rather did not.

SEARCH TERMS

"keypad deadbolt" · "keyless entry door lock" · "smart deadbolt with keypad" · "key turner grip aid".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ for the key turner, **\$\$** for the deadbolt. The key turner, yourself, today. The deadbolt, a handyman in under an hour, or yourself if the existing bolt comes out cleanly.

WHERE TO START

The door you come home through with your arms full.

Three more, quickly

These are the same idea in smaller places, and they need less explaining.

Jar lids. An under-cabinet opener mounts beneath a shelf and grips the lid while you turn the jar with both hands — the one design that asks nothing of your wrist at all. **EZ Off under-cabinet jar opener** **\$** is the one nearly thirty thousand people have reviewed, at 4.6. **A smaller V-shaped version** **\$** does the same job for less and takes up less room under the shelf. Rubber grip mats cost almost nothing and work better than they look; keep one in the drawer either way.

The thermostat. Large numbers, a lit screen, and buttons rather than a dial. A thermostat gets replaced once and then forgotten about for a decade, which is a good argument for getting the readable one now. **Suuwer non-programmable thermostat** **\$** and the **Heagstat equivalent** **\$** are both plain, both large-figured, and both have thousands of reviews holding at 4.5. *Non-programmable* is the phrase to look for if you want it to do one thing: hold the temperature you set. Before ordering, check whether your wall has the extra wire — the listing calls it a **C-wire** — because some models need it and older wiring often does not have one.

The refrigerator door. If your fridge has a shallow lip rather than a proper handle, fabric handle covers slip over the bar and give your fingers something thicker and softer to hold. A wet hand slides on a steel bar; it does not slide on cloth. **OUGAR8 covers, set of five** **\$** have nearly ten thousand reviews; **Miss.Silk** **\$** is the same idea from another maker. What they do **not** do is add a handle where there is none — if the door needs a real grip, that is a job for the appliance manufacturer's own part, not a cover.

The doorbell and the smoke alarm are built for a younger ear

This one is different, because the object works perfectly and you still miss it.

One in three people between sixty-five and seventy-four has some hearing loss, and close to half of people over seventy-five do. The national institute for deafness and communication disorders lists what that makes hard, and the list is short and domestic: **the telephone, the doorbell, and the smoke alarm.**

That is not a chapter about hearing. It is three objects in your house.

The doorbell. A doorbell that flashes a light as well as chiming, or one that sends the chime to a portable receiver you keep in the room you are actually in. The second kind solves a different problem too — the front door is often the furthest point from where you spend your day. Search: "wireless doorbell with flashing light" · "doorbell with portable receiver". **\$**, yourself.

The smoke alarm. Two things matter more than which model you buy. **Put one in the bedroom**, rather than letting a single alarm in the hallway do the work for the whole floor — a closed door between you and the sound costs more than any feature. And look at alarms that add a second channel to the sound: a strobe light, or a pad that goes under the mattress and shakes the bed. Those are made for exactly this. Search: "smoke alarm with strobe light" · "bed shaker smoke alarm". **\$\$**.

Interconnected alarms — where one going off sets off all of them — are worth asking your electrician about while they are already changing your switches.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

Which of the small workarounds in this chapter did you recognize before you finished the page?

How long have you been doing it?

Who taught you to do it that way — or did it just arrive?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

Hands lose the turning before they lose the holding. Most of what has become difficult asks for both at once.

A workaround is not a solution. It is a cost you have agreed to pay every day.

The switches and the faucets are the cheapest changes in this book, and the ones you touch most.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, change one switch. The bathroom one.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

It often starts with a jar. Someone watches you struggle with a lid, takes it out of your hands, opens it, and files it away as evidence.

What you can say:
"The lid is a lid. I've got a thing that opens them — remind me to show you."

Then show them. A workaround you chose reads differently from one you were caught at.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE TWENTY SECONDS AT NIGHT

From bed to bathroom in the dark

It is somewhere after two. You are awake, and you need the bathroom, and you have made this trip so many times that you do not turn on the light.

You sit on the edge of the bed for a moment. You stand — and there is that short pause while things settle. Then the bed, the corner of the dresser, the doorway, the hall, the cold tile, and back again — twenty seconds each way, in a house you could cross blindfolded.

You have crossed it blindfolded. That is what the dark is.

This is the most dangerous room in your house, and it is not close

Falls that send people to the emergency room happen more often in the bedroom than anywhere else in the house. A quarter of them, ahead of the stairs and ahead of the bathroom — which is a surprise to most people, because the bathroom is the room everyone worries about.

The number is not the useful part. The pattern underneath it is. As people get older, the share of falls in the bedroom climbs — from about one in five among people in their late sixties and early seventies, to nearly a third past eighty-five. Over the same stretch, falls on the stairs drop by half.

Nothing about that is mysterious. It is what happens when someone sensibly starts avoiding the stairs and spends more of the day and night in one room. The risk does not disappear. It moves in with you.

So this chapter is about twenty seconds, twice a night, in the room where you spend more time than any other. It is also one of the cheapest chapters in the book: most of what follows plugs into a wall.

Your eyes stopped adapting to the dark the way they used to

There is a real mechanism here, and it is worth knowing because it explains something you may have been blaming on yourself.

Less light reaches the back of an older eye. The pupil sits smaller than it did, so the opening is narrower; the lens inside the eye grows denser with the years, so less light passes through it; and more of what does get through scatters on the way rather than arriving cleanly. Add the plain fact that adjusting from light to dark takes longer than it once did — and the twenty seconds stop being what they were.

The room is the same. The doorway is where it always was. What has changed is how much of it your eye can gather in the second after you stand up, and how long it takes before the dark resolves into furniture.

There are no useful numbers to give you here. The lighting figures that circulate — *twice as much light, three times as much* — trace back to companies selling lamps rather than to anyone measuring eyes, so this book does not repeat them. What follows instead is testable: if you can see the edge of every surface between your bed and the toilet without turning on a ceiling light, the lighting is right. If you cannot, it is not, no matter what any box claims.

DARKNESS → LOW LIGHT THAT COMES ON BY ITSELF

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Two bad options. Cross the room in the dark and navigate from memory, or turn on a bright overhead light that wakes you fully, leaves you blinking, and costs you the next hour of sleep.

THE SWAP

Low light, near the floor, that comes on when you move and goes off by itself. Enough to see edges by. Not enough to wake you up.

WHAT TO BUY

The simple version. AUVON plug-in motion sensor night light **\$** — warm, dim, and it comes on when you move. Nearly twenty-one thousand reviews at 4.7, which is the most agreement you will find on anything in this book. MAZ-TEK **\$** does the same job for less, with over ten thousand reviews of its own, and lets you set the brightness. Buy several: one at the bedroom door, one in the hall, one at the bathroom.

Where there is no outlet. MCGOR rechargeable light bars **\$** stick under the bed frame, along a baseboard, or beneath a bathroom cabinet, and charge by cable every few weeks. This is what you use for the stretch of hallway with no socket — usually the stretch that matters.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Three things separate a night light that helps from one that annoys you.

Warm, not white. Cool blue-white light is the kind that tells your body it is morning. Look for *warm white* or *amber* on the box. This is the single thing people get wrong.

Below knee height. Light mounted low throws across the floor, which is where the obstacles are, and keeps the bulb itself out of your eyeline. A bare bulb in your field of view does the opposite of helping — your pupil closes against the glare and everything around it goes darker.

Motion, not dusk-to-dawn. A light that stays on all night is a light you stop seeing, and it will be dim by the time you need it. One that comes on when you move gives you full brightness at the moment you stand up.

And light the *transitions* — the bedroom door, the hall, the bathroom threshold. Moving between a lit space and a dark one is the part your eyes handle worst now.

SEARCH TERMS

"motion sensor night light plug in" · "warm white LED night light" · "rechargeable motion sensor light strip" · "under bed motion light".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

. Yourself, in about ten minutes, with no tools.

WHERE TO START

The path you already walk: bedside, doorway, hall, bathroom.

THE SWAP

A FLOOR YOU HAVE TO REMEMBER → A FLOOR YOU CAN

CROSS

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Every night you are walking a route you cannot fully see, past objects your daytime self put down without thinking.

THE SWAP

Clear the route once, deliberately, then keep it clear. This one costs nothing.

Walk the path from your side of the bed to the toilet in daylight and take out everything a foot could catch. The rug with the curled corner. The phone charger crossing the floor. The basket, the scale, the shoes, the stack of books beside the chair. A bag left overnight in a doorway is the classic — it was there for ten minutes when you put it down.

The two that need a decision rather than tidying.

Small rugs. A loose rug at a bedside or in a doorway is the one thing in this chapter worth being firm about: either it gets a proper non-slip pad underneath and lies perfectly flat, or it goes. A rug that slides or curls is a trip hazard in a room you cross in the dark.

The route itself. If the bed, a chair and a dresser leave you a narrow channel to turn sideways through, move the furniture rather than practicing the turn. It is free, and it lasts.

COST AND WHO DOES IT

Free, apart from the non-slip pads [💰]. An afternoon, and a second look every few months — things creep back.

THE SWAP

BARE FEET OR LOOSE SLIPPERS → SOMETHING WITH A BACK

AND A SOLE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Bare feet on tile give you nothing when you are unsteady. Loose slippers are worse: backless ones slide off mid-step, and the soft soles that feel kind in the shop have no grip on a wet bathroom floor.

THE SWAP

A slipper that stays on your foot and grips the floor.

WHAT TO BUY

The everyday pair. HomeTop closed-back house shoes  — a real rubber outsole rather than felt, a back that holds your heel, and the most reviewed slipper of its kind by a distance: over sixty thousand, holding at 4.4.

A firmer alternative. ULTRAIDEAS memory foam slippers, closed back  — thirty-five thousand reviews at 4.5, with a stiffer heel cup, which is what you want if your ankles roll a little. Both makers do a men's version of the same shoe.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

A **closed or strapped back**, so the shoe cannot leave your heel mid-step. A **rubber outsole with a tread pattern** you can see and feel — press your thumb into it; soft foam that gives easily will slide on a wet floor. A **firm heel cup**, because a slipper that collapses sideways is a slipper you are balancing on. And put them where your feet land when you sit up, not in a closet, or you will not wear them.

SEARCH TERMS

"closed back slippers rubber sole" · "non slip house shoes for seniors" · "adjustable slippers for swollen feet".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

. Yourself.

THE SWAP

EVERYTHING OUT OF REACH → ONE SURFACE WITHIN ARM'S

LENGTH

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Getting up and crossing a dark room for a glass of water, reading glasses, or a phone that is charging on the far side.

THE SWAP

One surface beside the bed, at the height of your mattress, with the four things on it you might need at three in the morning: a light you can switch on without sitting up, your phone, water, and your glasses.

WHAT TO BUY

A light you can reach lying down. Fenmzee dimmable touch lamp (\$) comes on at a tap anywhere on the base and steps through brightness levels, so you can have just enough light to find your slippers. Thirteen thousand reviews at 4.5. UNIFUN's rechargeable version (\$) costs about half as much, runs cordless for several nights on a charge, and is small enough to carry with you to the bathroom.

Whatever you buy, it should light at a **touch anywhere on it** rather than a small switch under a shade, and it should have a **low setting**. A bedside lamp that only does full brightness will wake you properly, and then you are up.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The light matters most: it should come on at a **touch anywhere on it**, not a small switch, and it should have a **low setting** you can use without waking yourself. Charge it on a schedule you will remember, or buy the plug-in kind.

And keep your phone **beside you, not across the room**. This is a chapter about twenty seconds in the dark, but it is also the room where a person who has fallen spends the longest waiting, because it happens at night when everyone else is asleep. A phone within reach of the floor beside your bed is the cheapest thing in this book that shortens that wait. There is more on this in the chapter on living alone.

SEARCH TERMS

"rechargeable touch bedside lamp" · "bedside caddy mattress" · "stick on puck light bed frame".

One thing that is not a product

A great many night-time trips to the bathroom are a matter of habit rather than need, and some of them are the consequence of something a doctor can look at: medication taken in the evening, fluid that settles in the legs during the day and moves when you lie down, or a bladder issue that has a name and a treatment.

If you are up three and four times a night, that is worth a conversation before it is worth a night light. Take a week's notes with you — how many times, roughly when, and what you drank after six. A list like that turns a vague complaint into something a doctor can act on.

The lights and the clear floor are still worth doing. They just work better on two trips a night than on five.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Picture the route from your side of the bed to the toilet. How many things are on that floor right now?

When did you last make that trip with a light on?

Where is your phone at three in the morning?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

The bedroom, not the bathroom, is where most falls at home happen — and its share rises as people get older and use the stairs less.

Less light reaches the back of your eye than it used to, and the adjustment takes longer. The room did not change; the twenty seconds did.

Warm light, below knee height, on a motion sensor. Not a ceiling light, and not the dark.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

Tonight, put one plug-in sensor light in the outlet nearest your bedroom door. One socket, ten seconds, and see what it shows you.



CHAPTER FIVE

WHERE WATER MEETS TILE

A bathroom that does not have to look like a hospital

You are stepping out of the shower. One foot is on the mat, the other is still on wet tile, and your hand goes out for the edge of the sink — not because you are falling, but because that is what your hand does now, every time, and has done for a while.

Look at what it reaches for. A towel bar, screwed into drywall with two small anchors. The soap shelf. The edge of a glass door. Not one of those was built to hold a person.

That is the whole chapter. Not that you need help — you have already decided that, and your hand made the decision. It is that the things you are holding cannot do the job you have given them.

What the bathroom actually asks of you

Nothing in the room is unreasonable on its own. Together they are a lot.

You step over something while balancing on one foot. You stand on a hard, wet, slippery surface with nothing to hold. You bend, reach behind you, twist, and lower yourself onto a seat that is probably too low. You close your eyes and tip your head back under running water, which removes your vision and your balance at the same moment, on the most slippery floor in the house.

About one fall in five that sends someone to the emergency room happens in a bathroom — slightly fewer than in the bedroom or on the stairs, and far more than the room's size would suggest. Every one of the things below makes one of those moments easier, and most of them cost less than a night out.

A note on the numbers in this chapter

The measurements here come from the federal accessibility standard, and it is worth being clear about what that is.

It is **law for public and commercial buildings — not for your house**. No rule requires your bathroom to meet any of it. What the standard is good for is that people measured these things carefully, on purpose, and published the results. So the numbers are the best free guidance available, and you can treat them as a target rather than an obligation. If your contractor says something different for a good reason, that is allowed. If he says it because it is easier, now you know enough to ask.

SOMETHING TO GRAB → SOMETHING BUILT TO HOLD YOU

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Your hand is already reaching. Right now it lands on a towel bar or a soap dish, and those will come off the wall if you ever put real weight on them — at the exact moment you most need them not to.

THE SWAP

A proper grab bar, in the two places your hand already goes.

The number that matters. A grab bar has to hold **250 pounds** of force, pushed in any direction at any point along it. That requirement is not just about the bar. It covers the screws, the mounting, and **the structure inside the wall behind it** — the standard says so in those words. This is why a grab bar goes into a stud or a proper backing plate, never into drywall with the anchors that come in the packet. A bar that pulls out of the wall is worse than no bar, because you were trusting it.

Read this before you buy anything with suction cups. Suction-cup handles are sold beside real grab bars, in the same aisle, and they look similar. They are not grab bars. They do not appear in any accessibility standard, they are not rated to hold a person, and they can release without warning on a wet or textured tile. As a handhold for steadying yourself while you are already balanced, they are a convenience. **Do not put your weight on one, and do not let anyone install one instead of the real thing.** If you are renting and cannot drill, that is a conversation with your landlord — there is a section on renters' rights in the money chapter — not a reason to trust a rubber cup.

Where they go.

In the shower, at **33 to 36 inches** off the floor. If you fit two, put them at the **same height** as each other — shower bars work as a continuous handhold, unlike the ones by a toilet.

Beside the toilet, also at 33 to 36 inches: one on the side wall, at least **42 inches** long, and one behind, at least **36 inches**.

Two details people get wrong. The gap between bar and wall is **1½ inches** — and that is an exact figure, not a minimum. Wider is not safer; a bigger gap lets an arm slip through and catch at the wrist. And keep the area around the bar clear: nothing within 12 inches above it, or 1½ inches below and at the ends, so your hand can wrap the whole way around it.

WHAT TO BUY

Moen Home Care 24-inch grab bar, 8724 (\$) — stainless steel, concealed screws, and the box says *complies with ADA specifications*, which is the shorthand for everything above. Six thousand reviews at 4.8, and it is made by the same company as half the faucets in this book.

Matte black grab bars, 18 inch, pair (\$\$) — for a bathroom where you do not want anything that reads as medical. Same rating, modern finish, sold in twos so you can do the shower and the toilet in one order.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The box should say either **ADA compliant** or give a weight rating of 250 pounds or more — the first is the phrase manufacturers actually use, and it carries the 250-pound requirement with it. Then look for **concealed screws** and a **knurled or textured grip** that still works with soap on it. Stainless steel with rounded ends. It must not rotate in its mounts when you grip it and pull.

And ignore the ones that look medical if you do not want them to. Grab bars now come in the same finishes as faucets — brushed nickel, matte black, bronze — and there are models designed as a towel bar or a shelf that happen to be rated to hold a person. Same engineering, no white plastic. Some people want the bar to look like a bar, because it tells visitors what it is for; some want it invisible. Both are fine.

SEARCH TERMS

"ADA grab bar 250 lb" · "stainless steel grab bar brushed nickel" · "designer grab bar towel bar combination" · "grab bar stud mount".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

(**\$**) to (**\$\$**) for the bar. **This is the one job in the chapter to give a professional** unless you own a stud finder and know how to use it

— the bar is only as good as what is behind the tile.

WHERE TO START The shower. Then the toilet.

STANDING THROUGH A SHOWER → SITTING THROUGH ONE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Standing on wet tile for ten minutes, with your eyes closed part of the time, is the single most demanding thing you do in a day. Many people quietly shower less often because of it.

THE SWAP

A seat. That is all.

A shower chair is the change with the worst image and the best return in this chapter. It is not a medical appliance and it is not an admission of anything — it is a chair, in the one room where you were expected to stand.

Height matters: 17 to 19 inches, the same as a comfortable dining chair, and the same as a comfort-height toilet. Too low and you cannot get up from it. Measure before you buy.

WHAT TO BUY

Medline shower chair with back and padded arms **[\$\$]** — adjustable legs, drainage holes, arms to push up from. Thirty-five thousand reviews at 4.7, which makes it the most tested object in this chapter by a wide margin.

HOMLAND adjustable shower chair **[\$]** — the same idea for less, from a different maker, with six thousand reviews of its own. Buy this one if the Medline will not fit your shower floor.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Adjustable legs with rubber feet, so it sits level in a tub or on a sloping shower floor. A **drainage pattern** in the seat, or you sit in a puddle. **Weight rating** printed on it. A **back** if you will be sitting for a while; without one, a stool is fine for a quick wash and awkward for a long one. And measure the floor of your shower before ordering — this is the most commonly returned item in the whole category, because people buy a chair that will not fit.

If a chair in the shower is more than you want, a **corner stool** takes up less room, and a **transfer bench** is what you buy if getting over

the wall of a tub is the actual problem: it straddles the edge so you sit down outside and slide across.

SEARCH TERMS

"shower chair with back adjustable height" · "shower stool corner" · "tub transfer bench".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$**. Yourself, out of the box.

FIXED SHOWER HEAD → ONE YOU CAN BRING TO YOU

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A fixed head means you have to move your whole body into the water and stay there. Sitting down makes that worse, not better, because now the water is above you and aimed somewhere else.

THE SWAP

A hand-held head on a hose and a sliding bar.

What the standard says, and it is useful here: the hose should be long enough to reach from its holder to a seated person, and the head should sit no more than **48 inches** above the floor so you can take it down without standing up.

WHAT TO BUY

AquaCare handheld shower head with hose  — the most reviewed one there is, at over fifty thousand, and it screws onto your existing shower arm in about ten minutes.

GwernKB handheld head with on-off switch  — buy this one if the pause button matters to you: it has a switch on the handle and a hose just over six feet, both of which are the things that make sitting down work.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

A **long hose** — six feet at minimum, and longer is better if you sit. A **slide bar** so the height can change for whoever is using it, or a simple hook mounted low if you are the only one. A **pause button** on the head itself, so you can stop the water without reaching for the faucet. And a **lever or large dial** rather than a small knob to control it.

One more thing from the standard, and it decides whether the shower works for you at all: the controls should be usable **with one hand, without a tight grip, and with no more than five pounds of force**. If your shower valve needs a hard twist, the valve is the problem, not you — and that is a plumber's job, not a purchase.

SEARCH TERMS

"handheld shower head with slide bar" · "6 foot shower hose" ·
"handheld shower head with pause button".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$. Most screw onto the existing arm in ten minutes with no tools; a slide bar needs drilling, so it goes with the grab bar job.

The floor, the threshold, and the toilet

Three smaller things, each worth a paragraph.

The floor. Bath mats are the most common thing in this room, and the most commonly wrong. A mat that slides is worse than bare tile, because you trusted it. Inside the shower or tub, use a **non-slip mat with real suction underneath** and lift it after use so mildew does not grow beneath. Outside, use a mat with a **rubberized backing** that grips wet tile, and get rid of the small decorative one by the sink — that is the one that curls.

The threshold. If you step over a wall of a tub or a lip at the shower door, that is the hardest movement in this room: lifting one leg while balancing on the other, wet. The standard for a shower entry is a threshold of **half an inch**, sloped — and in an existing home, **three quarters of an inch** with both sides beveled is accepted. Anything higher is worth pricing a change for. Taking the wall out of a shower is real construction and belongs in the money chapter, but a **threshold ramp** is a cheaper interim step, and a transfer bench solves the same problem for less.

The toilet. A standard toilet seat sits low, and getting up from it uses your knees hard. **Comfort height is 17 to 19 inches** to the top of the seat, which is the same range as the shower chair, and almost every manufacturer sells one. If replacing the toilet is not on the table, a **raised seat** that clamps onto the existing bowl gets you the same height for a fraction of the cost — and a **toilet safety frame**, which is a pair of arms that bolt on under the seat, gives you something to push up from if a wall bar is not where you need it.

Drive Medical 2-in-1 raised seat with removable arms **\$\$** is the cheap, widely used answer — eighteen thousand reviews, though at 4.2 it is the lowest-rated thing recommended in this book, and the complaints are about fit, so measure your bowl first. **A padded version with fixed handles** **\$\$** costs more and rates better, and is the one to choose if you will be using it every day rather than through a recovery.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

What does your hand reach for when you step out of the shower — and is it screwed into anything?

When did you last sit down in your own bathroom, other than on the toilet?

If the shower takes more out of you than it used to, have you started showering less often?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

A grab bar must hold 250 pounds, and that includes the wall behind it. A towel bar holds a towel.

Suction-cup handles are not grab bars. Steady yourself with one if you like; never trust it with your weight.

Seventeen to nineteen inches is the height that lets you stand back up — from a shower chair and from a toilet alike.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, stand where you step out of the shower and put your hand where it naturally goes. That spot is where the first bar belongs. Mark it with a piece of tape.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

The bathroom is the room families point at, because it is the one they can picture going wrong.

What you can say:
*"I've got the
bathroom taken care
of — bar in the
shower, proper seat,
handheld. Come and
look at it next time
you're here."*

A room that has visibly been thought about ends that conversation faster than any argument. It also happens to be true.



CHAPTER SIX

THE KITCHEN THAT STOPPED COOPERATING

Reach, lift, open, carry

Somebody asks you to bring the thing you always bring. The one you have made for every family gathering for twenty years, the one that is basically yours.

You hear yourself say you were thinking of doing something different this time.

The recipe has not changed. What changed is the pot it needs, which lives on the shelf above the refrigerator, and the fact that the pot comes out of the oven heavy and has to travel to the counter without a pause anywhere along the way. One year you made it with a pause in the middle. The next year you made something else.

The kitchen keeps a record

Most rooms in a house hide what they are costing you. The kitchen writes it down.

It writes it in the menu. The list of things you cook has quietly shortened — and each item left it for a reason that had nothing to do with whether you liked it. The roast left because of the pan. The soup left because of the pot. The thing that needs an hour of standing left because of the hour of standing.

It writes it in the shopping, too. The smaller bag of flour, because the big one has to be lifted onto the counter. The pre-cut vegetables — three times the price, and you buy them anyway.

None of that is a safety problem. Nothing on that list would appear on a hazard checklist, because nothing on it has hurt you. It is a life getting narrower by one dish at a time, and the room is telling you so in the only language it has.

So this chapter is not about preventing an accident in the kitchen. It is about getting the menu back.

Four verbs

Everything a kitchen asks of you comes down to four movements, and they fail in a particular order.

Reach. Up to the wall cabinets, down to the back of the base cabinets. Both ends of that range got further away — and the things you use every day did not move.

Lift. Not the food. The equipment. A full stockpot is heavy because it is full, which you expect. A cast-iron skillet is heavy empty — which is not something you think about at forty, when it is simply a good pan.

Open. Cans, vacuum-sealed packaging, an oven door with a stiff spring. Jars were the first chapter of this story and you already have the answer to those.

Carry. The one that gets least attention and causes the most trouble. Carrying uses both hands — which means that for the length of the journey you have no hand free for balance, and you are usually walking toward something hot.

Underneath all four is the same slow change. Muscle mass and strength peak somewhere around your early thirties and then decline gradually for decades, and the decline speeds up after sixty-five in women. That is the national institute on aging describing its own long-running study, not a marketing claim. The same institute reports that roughly three in ten adults over seventy have difficulty walking, getting up from a chair, or climbing stairs.

Notice what that means for a kitchen. Getting up from a chair and squatting down to the back of a low cabinet are the same movement — the same muscles, the same push. If one of them has become work, the other one has too, and you have been doing it four times a day without counting.

The line at forty-eight inches

Here is something worth doing before you buy anything.

Take a tape measure. Measure forty-eight inches up from your kitchen floor and put a piece of tape on the wall at that height. Then stand back and look at what lives above the line.

Forty-eight inches is the top of the reach range in the federal accessibility standard: the band between fifteen and forty-eight inches where the controls and the useful parts of things are supposed to sit in a building that has to work for everybody. If there is an obstruction to reach over, like a counter, the ceiling drops to forty-four.

Two honest caveats about that number. It is law for public and commercial buildings, not for your house, and no rule is going to make you move a shelf. And it was written around people reaching from a seated position, so it is not a description of your arm.

What it is good for is the principle. Somebody measured carefully, on purpose, and decided that in a building designed to work for everybody, useful things belong inside a band — not wherever there happened to be room. Your kitchen was designed the other way around. The cabinets go to the ceiling because the ceiling was there.

Now look at your tape line again, and at the shelf above it, and ask what is up there that you use in an average week.

The answer is usually one or two things, sitting above eight things you have not touched since the last time you moved house. That is the whole problem, and most of it costs nothing to fix.

THE TOP SHELF → A MORNING, NOT A PURCHASE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Every time an everyday object lives above shoulder height, you either stretch for it, or you bring a chair, or you do without. The stretch is the one that costs. Reaching overhead for something with weight in it puts your head back, shifts your balance backward and takes your eyes off the floor — all in the same second.

THE SWAP

Move the things. Do not buy anything yet.

This is the cheapest change in this book and the one most people skip, because it feels like housework rather than progress. Give it one morning.

Empty the wall cabinets onto the table. Sort what comes out into three piles: **every week**, **a few times a year**, and **honestly never**.

Everything in the first pile goes between your hip and your shoulder. That is your real reach range, and it beats any number in any standard, because it is measured on you. Everything in the second pile goes up high, where it can stay — you get it down with help on the two days a year you need it. The third pile leaves the house.

That last part is the one people argue with. The good roasting pan from a kitchen you no longer have, the appliance somebody gave you, the set of anything. Those are not really about cooking, and a guide about hardware is the wrong place to work out what to do with them. For now, get them off the shelf you use every day. They can wait in the garage without losing whatever they mean.

What you will find. Most people discover the everyday pile is small — a dozen objects that do nine meals out of ten — and that it fits easily inside a range they can reach standing flat on the floor. The kitchen did not need rebuilding. It needed sorting.

WHERE TO START The cabinet above the stove. It is the highest one you reach over heat, and it is where the everyday pans usually end up.

THE SWAP

THE BACK OF THE BASE CABINET → SHELVES THAT COME TO

YOU

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A base cabinet is a cave. To get the pot at the back you crouch, put one hand on the floor or the cabinet frame, lean in past your own knee, and pull out a heavy thing from a low position with your arm extended. That is the single most demanding movement in the whole kitchen, and the pot you keep back there is usually the heaviest thing you own.

So you stop using what is at the back. The front two feet of every base cabinet are in daily use — the rest is storage for objects you have quietly retired.

THE SWAP

A pull-out shelf: a tray on drawer slides that screws into the cabinet you already have and brings the back to the front. You open the door, pull once, and everything is in the light at the edge of the cabinet where you can see it and lift it without leaning in.

This is the highest-value change in the kitchen, and it is the one people are most surprised by, because it doubles the usable space in cabinets they thought were full.

WHAT TO BUY

STORKING pull-out cabinet organizer, 15 by 22 inches **\$\$** — one deep tray on full-extension ball-bearing slides, rated to a hundred pounds. This is the pots-and-pans one. Nearly two thousand reviews holding at 4.8, the highest rating of anything in this chapter.

DINDON two-tier pull-out shelves **\$\$** — the same idea on two levels, for a tall cabinet where a single tray wastes everything above it. The lower basket has two height settings, so it can clear a cabinet lip that would otherwise block it. Fourteen hundred reviews at 4.7. One thing to know before you order: it mounts to the floor of the cabinet, not the sides.

Kitstorack two-tier under-sink organizer **\$\$** — for the cabinet under the sink, where the pipes make a normal shelf impossible. It adjusts through five heights and holds fifty pounds, and it fixes in place with suction cups and adhesive pads rather than screws. That is the right answer for a tray of cleaning bottles and the wrong

answer for anything you would put weight on, for the reasons in the bathroom chapter. Four and a half thousand reviews at 4.6 — the most-reviewed thing in this chapter.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Measure three things before you order, in this order: the **width of the cabinet opening** (not the cabinet, the opening — the frame steals an inch or more on each side), the **depth**, and the **height of the shelf space** you are giving it. A pull-out that is a quarter inch too wide will not go in, and that is the mistake that sends the box back.

Then look at the slides. **Full-extension** slides bring the whole tray clear of the cabinet; partial ones stop short and leave the back where it was — which defeats the point. A **weight rating of around a hundred pounds** is plenty for pots and comfortable for a cabinet of cans, which is heavier than people expect. **Ball-bearing** slides run more smoothly than roller slides and stay smooth for longer.

And check what it fastens to. Most of these mount to the sides of the cabinet; a few need a floor mount. If your cabinets have a face frame — a lip of wood around the opening — look for the word **frame** or **face-frame compatible** in the listing, or buy the spacers separately.

SEARCH TERMS

"pull out cabinet organizer" · "slide out cabinet shelf full extension" · "under sink pull out drawer" · "pull out pantry shelves".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ per shelf. A handy person with a drill does one in about twenty minutes; a carpenter will do a whole kitchen in an afternoon. If you have never used a drill, this is a good first job to hire out, because a shelf mounted slightly crooked will annoy you every day.

WHERE TO START

The cabinet with the pots in it. Then the one under the sink, which is the worst-organized cabinet in nearly every house.

HEAVY PANS → PANS YOU CAN LIFT WITH ONE HAND

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Count the weight you move in one meal. The pan onto the burner. The pan off the burner while it is full and hot. The pan into the sink. A heavy skillet asks for that four times a meal — and the fourth time comes at the end of a day, when you are tired and the pan is wet.

There is a piece of arithmetic worth knowing here. The further from your body you hold something, the more of its weight your shoulder and back are actually carrying — a pan held at arm's length over a stove is a much bigger ask than the same pan held against your chest. That is why sliding a heavy dish out of the oven onto the open door, then lifting it close to you, is easier than lifting it out in one motion, even though it is the same dish.

THE SWAP

Lighter everyday pans, and two handles rather than one wherever you can get them.

Cast iron is wonderful and it is not going anywhere — keep the one you love for the two dishes that need it. But the pan you use five nights a week does not need to weigh what it weighs.

WHAT TO BUY

T-Fal Ultimate hard anodized 12-inch pan with lid **[\$\$]** — the listing puts it at **two pounds**, which for a twelve-inch pan is genuinely light, and the handles are riveted silicone rather than bare metal. Fourteen thousand reviews at 4.7.

Tramontina Professional 10-inch nonstick pan **[\$\$]** — about the same weight in a smaller pan, which is the right size for one or two people and lighter again when it is full. The silicone handle sleeve slides off, so the pan goes in the oven to four hundred degrees. Nearly eleven thousand reviews at 4.6.

Cuisinart 12-inch nonstick skillet with helper handle **[\$\$]** — the one with the second handle. It weighs more than the T-Fal, at three and a half pounds, and that is the honest trade: two hands on a heavier pan beats one hand on a lighter one once there is food in it.

Cool-grip stainless handles, and around eighteen hundred reviews at 4.6.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Pick the pan up in the store, empty, in one hand, and hold it out in front of you for a slow count of five. That test tells you more than any specification, and the listings almost never print a weight.

Then look for a **helper handle** — the short second handle opposite the long one. It turns a one-armed lift into a two-armed one and it is the single most useful feature on a large pan. Look for a **flat, wide handle** rather than a round rod, because a round handle has to be gripped and a flat one can be held. **Stay-cool handles** mean one less thing to hold with a folded towel while your wrist is already loaded.

Size honestly. A twelve-inch pan is heavier than a ten-inch one by more than the difference sounds, and most people cooking for one or two never fill the big one.

SEARCH TERMS

"lightweight nonstick frying pan helper handle" · "hard anodized skillet two handles" · "lightweight stockpot".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$\$. Yourself, today.

WHERE TO START

The pan you reach for without thinking. That is the one doing the damage.

CARRYING → ROLLING

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

You cook in one room and eat in another, and everything you cooked has to cross the gap in your hands. So you make two trips, or three — or you overload one trip because you are tired of walking back. On the overloaded trip you cannot see your feet, you have no hand for the door frame, and you are carrying something hot.

This is the moment in the kitchen with the highest cost attached to it, and it is almost never on anybody's list.

THE SWAP

A rolling cart. You load it at the counter, push it where you are going, and unload it standing still. Nothing is ever carried more than an arm's length.

It sounds like a small thing. It removes the trip entirely.

WHAT TO BUY

Finnhomy three-tier utility cart **[\$\$]** — the one that meets every condition above. Four-inch industrial wheels, two of them with brakes, a proper push bar, and shelves you can move in one-inch steps so the top one sits as close to your counter as it will go. Thirty inches wide and about thirty-two tall. Four and a half thousand reviews at 4.7.

EAGMAK three-tier rolling cart **[\$]** — narrower, lighter, a third of the price, and it still has the curved push handles and two locking wheels. It holds fifty-five pounds per shelf rather than hundreds, which is plenty for dinner and not enough for a stand mixer. Two thousand reviews at 4.4, the lowest rating in this chapter and worth knowing before you choose it.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Wheels are the whole decision. Big wheels cross thresholds and rugs; tiny ones catch. At least two should lock, so the cart does not move while you load it. If your floors are hard, rubber wheels are quieter and kinder to wood than plastic.

A handle you can push against matters more than shelf space. Some carts are only shelves on casters with nothing to hold — and a cart without a handle is something you steer with a fingertip while it drifts.

Check the **height**. Most carts stop a few inches below a kitchen counter — get as close as you can, because a cart near counter height lets you slide a heavy dish across instead of lifting it, and that is the trick that makes the whole thing worth the money.

A word of warning worth saying plainly: a rolling cart is not something to lean on. It moves, which is the point. If you want something to steady yourself on while you cross a room, that is a different object and a different conversation with a professional.

SEARCH TERMS

"rolling kitchen cart with handle" · "utility cart locking wheels" · "kitchen island cart on wheels". In Britain and Ireland, "kitchen trolley".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$**. Some assembly, an hour, and the box is heavy — have it left inside the door rather than on the step.

WHERE TO START

The route you walk most: stove to table, or kitchen to wherever you actually eat.

THE SWAP

A COUNTER IN YOUR OWN SHADOW → LIGHT WHERE YOUR

HANDS ARE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Stand at your counter in the evening with the overhead light on and look at the surface right in front of you. The light is behind you, so your own body is throwing a shadow onto exactly the twelve inches where the knife is.

You have compensated without noticing — you lean in, you turn the board toward the window, you chop a little more carefully than you used to.

Why it got worse. Less light reaches the back of an older eye than a younger one, for two reasons that are both ordinary and both permanent: the pupil gets smaller, and the lens gets denser. The loss of contrast sensitivity that comes with it is worse in dim light than in good light, which is why the same counter is fine at noon and hard at eight.

A shadow is a contrast problem. So the kitchen at night is asking your eyes for exactly the thing that has become hardest, while you hold a blade.

THE SWAP

Light mounted under the wall cabinets, pointing down at the counter. It comes from in front of you instead of behind you, so your body has nothing to cast a shadow with.

WHAT TO BUY

WOBANE under-cabinet LED kit, dimmable, with remote **\$** — warm at 2700 kelvin, fifteen hundred lumens across the strip, and the remote means you are not reaching behind the cabinet for a switch. Ten thousand reviews at 4.5.

Litever six-bar under-cabinet kit **\$\$** — six twelve-inch bars, three thousand kelvin, two thousand lumens, and it can be plugged in now and hard-wired later if you ever redo the kitchen. This is the one for a long counter. Three thousand reviews at 4.7.

Gritin rechargeable stick-on lights, pair **\$** — for the insides of things. They charge by cable, stick on magnetically, come on when your hand goes in and switch off twenty seconds later, and one of the three color settings is the warm one. Twenty-three thousand reviews at 4.6 — put one in the pantry and one under the sink.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Decide first between **plug-in** and **battery**. Plug-in is brighter and never needs charging, but it needs a socket and you will be managing a cord. Battery or rechargeable strips stick on anywhere in five minutes with no tools — which, for most people, is the difference between doing it this week and meaning to.

Then look at the light itself. **Warm white**, somewhere around 3000 kelvin, is kinder to look at than the blue-white kind and shows food closer to its real color. **Dimmable** is worth having if the kitchen is also where you sit in the evening. And mount the strip toward the **front edge** of the cabinet bottom, not the back — at the back, the light hits the wall and you get a bright backsplash and a dim chopping board.

While you are at it: the inside of the pantry and the inside of the cabinet under the sink are the two darkest places in the house, and a stick-on light in each costs almost nothing.

SEARCH TERMS

"under cabinet lighting plug in warm white" · "rechargeable under cabinet light bar motion sensor" · "LED strip light under cabinet dimmable".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ to **\$\$**. Yourself, in an afternoon, with adhesive strips. Hard-wired under-cabinet lighting is a bigger job and an electrician's, and it is worth it only if you are redoing the kitchen anyway.

WHERE TO START

Above the counter where you chop. Then the sink.

FORTY MINUTES OF STANDING → FORTY MINUTES OF SITTING

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Prep is standing still, which is harder on a back and a pair of knees than walking is. And standing is what you run out of first — so the meal that needs half an hour of chopping becomes the meal you do not make, and the reason never gets said out loud.

THE SWAP

Something to sit on at counter height, kept in the kitchen rather than fetched.

The reason it has to live there is human, not practical. A stool in the next room is a stool you will not go and get — fetching it is an admission, and carrying it is work. A stool already standing by the counter is furniture.

WHAT TO BUY

Signature Design by Ashley swivel counter stool **\$\$** — sold one at a time, which is what you want when the stool is for the kitchen rather than a matching set for a bar you do not have. Seat at twenty-four inches, a contoured back, a seven-inch metal footrest, hardwood base, rated to two hundred and fifty pounds. Four thousand reviews at 4.5.

PrimeZone counter stools, pair **\$\$\$** — a wrap-around footrest rather than a single bar, so your feet land somewhere useful whichever way you have turned, and a rubberwood frame rated to three hundred pounds. Sold in twos, which works out cheaper each if you want one at the counter and one at the table. Eleven hundred reviews at 4.6.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Height first. For a standard counter you want a seat around **24 inches**; for a taller bar, around **30**. Sit on it before you commit if you possibly can, because two inches wrong makes a stool useless.

Then look for a **back** and for a **footrest**. A backless stool is a stool for five minutes. A footrest is what makes sitting at counter height comfortable rather than a slow slide forward.

And check how you get off it. A seat that swivels is easier to leave than one that does not — you turn toward the room rather than shuffling backward off the edge. What makes that safe is the base: a four-legged wooden or steel frame, wide at the floor. Nothing on a single central column, and nothing on castors.

SEARCH TERMS

"counter height stool with back and footrest" · "24 inch swivel counter stool" · "kitchen stool with arms".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$\$ to **\$\$\$**. Assembly, half an hour.

WHERE TO START

Wherever you do the chopping — not the breakfast bar, where it will quietly become a place to put things down.

Two more, and then the rest is sorting

The can. A manual can opener asks for grip and rotation at the same time — the pair that goes first. A battery-powered one sits on the counter, clamps on, and runs by itself while your hands do nothing. It is a small object with an unreasonably good return.

Hamilton Beach Smooth Touch can opener **\$\$** — the side-seam one. Eighty-three thousand reviews at 4.6, which is the largest body of evidence behind any product in this book, and the lever takes one hand and almost no force.

Cuisinart one-touch can opener **\$** — half the price, a wide non-slip base, and sixty-four thousand reviews at 4.5. It cuts the lid the old way, so the lid comes off with an edge on it. If that does not bother you, this is the better buy.

Look for one that opens the can by cutting the **side seam** rather than the lid, because it leaves no sharp edge at all and the lid drops on rather than in.

The thing on the high shelf you did not get rid of. A reacher — a long-handled grabber with a trigger — is genuinely useful for a box of cereal or a bag of pasta on a shelf you can see but not touch.

RMS 32-inch reachers, pair **\$\$** — a rotating jaw, so you can turn the grip to match whatever you are picking up rather than turning your wrist. Twenty-eight thousand reviews at 4.8, the

best-rated product in this chapter.

A foldable pair for a third of the price  — twelve thousand reviews at 4.6, and its own listing prints the limit plainly: **two pounds held out in front of you, five pounds lifted straight up.** Those numbers are the argument in the paragraph below, in the manufacturer's own words.

One condition, and it is not negotiable: a reacher is for light things — the numbers above are the whole rule. Anything with real weight in it, brought down from above your head on the end of a stick, is a worse idea than the chair you were trying to avoid. For heavy things on high shelves the answer is the morning of sorting at the top of this chapter, not a tool.

And the rest. Rubber grip mats in the drawer. A kettle or a pitcher light enough to lift when it is full, rather than one you end up filling halfway twice. A cutting board with a lip, so the board does the catching instead of your hand. None of those needs a page.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

What is one thing you used to cook and do not cook now?

When you picture making it, which part of the picture is the part you stop at?

Is it the reaching, the lifting, the opening, or the carrying?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

The menu is the record. What left your list, and why it left, is the most accurate survey of this room you will ever get.

The back of a low cabinet and the shelf above your head are the two most expensive places in the kitchen. Most of what is in them can move for free.

Carrying is the movement with the highest cost and the lowest profile. It is also the easiest one to remove.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, put a piece of tape on the wall at forty-eight inches and look at what lives above it. Do not move anything yet. Just look.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

The kitchen is where this conversation usually starts, because it is the room they can see you working in. Somebody watches you lift a pan with two hands, or take something down from a high shelf, and it lands in their head as evidence.

What you can say:
*"I've been
reorganizing in here.
Come and look at
what I did with the
bottom cabinets."*

It is true, and it changes what is being discussed. A kitchen somebody has deliberately rebuilt around herself reads as competence. The same kitchen, unchanged, with a workaround happening in it, reads as decline. The difference is not the body. It is whether the changes look chosen.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAY IN AND THE WAY OUT

Doors, steps, stairs — and getting to the car

The invitation is for Thursday evening. You want to go. You like these people, and you have not seen them since the summer.

Then you look out of the window. It gets dark at five now. There are three steps down from your door and a rail on one side only, the path has a lip in it where a root pushed the slab up, and the car is parked past where the streetlight reaches.

You say you will see how you feel on the day.

You already know how you will feel on the day.

A house has two boundaries, and both of them move inward

One is the front door. The other is the bottom of the stairs.

Neither announces itself. What happens instead is that the going gets slightly worse, and the not-going gets slightly easier — and one evening the two cross over. After that the decision has already been made before you think about it.

Here is the measurement that shows it happening. Of the falls at home that send someone to an emergency room, the stairs account for a little under a quarter — second only to the bedroom, and ahead of the bathroom. But the share of falls that happen on stairs **drops by half** between the late sixties and the mid-eighties.

Stairs do not get safer. People stop climbing them.

That is the trade being made, and it is worth seeing clearly, because it is never presented as a trade. Somebody stops going upstairs and the falls-on-stairs risk goes down — it looks like caution working. What it actually is: half a house, given up, to avoid a number — and the bedroom that person now spends all day in is the room where falls are most common of all.

The same thing happens at the front door, and it costs more. Upstairs you lose rooms. Out the front you lose people.

The strongest evidence in this book

Most of what gets recommended for a house comes with thin evidence behind it. This does not.

A systematic review pooling twelve trials and more than five thousand people found that **reducing hazards in the home cuts the rate of falls by about a quarter**. Among people already at high risk of falling, the reduction was closer to two-fifths. Hazards, in that research, means the ordinary list — clutter, loose rugs, poor lighting, the things you trip on and the places with nothing to hold.

Two more findings from the same review are worth having.

It worked better when an occupational therapist did the assessment than when it was done without one. That is a profession most people have never knowingly used, and in many countries a referral is free or close to it. They come to your house, watch you move through it, and tell you what to change — which is a different exercise from reading a checklist. The money chapter has how to find one where you live.

And the same review did **not** find convincing evidence for three things that get recommended constantly: updating a glasses prescription on its own, special footwear on its own, or fall-prevention education on its own. Those are not useless. They are not, by themselves, what moves the number. Changing the house is.

So this chapter is the one with the most behind it, and the stairs are where it starts.

ONE HANDRAIL → A HANDRAIL ON BOTH SIDES

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

With a rail on one side you have a strong side and a weak side. Going up you use the rail; coming down, which is the harder direction, you may be on the wrong side of it. If you are carrying anything at all, one hand is gone — and you have a choice between the rail and the laundry.

Coming down is the direction that matters. Your weight is going forward, your eyes are doing the work, and you cannot see the tread you are about to land on because your own foot is in the way.

THE SWAP

A second handrail, on the other wall.

Of everything in this book, this is the change with the most evidence behind it and the least drama attached to it. It costs less than a chair. In a hallway with a rail on both sides you can go down with a hand on each, which is how a person who is tired or unsteady or carrying something actually gets down a flight of stairs.

What the standard says, and it is worth following here. The public-building rule is a good specification for a private staircase, and in this one case the numbers are easy to hit.

Height: **34 to 38 inches** above the front edge of the treads, measured the whole way up so the rail runs parallel to the stairs. Grip: **round, between 1¼ and 2 inches across** — thick enough to hold, thin enough that your fingers meet around it. A flat plank screwed to the wall is not a handrail — you cannot get your hand around it, and it does nothing at the moment your hand slips.

And the detail almost everybody misses: the rail should **extend past the stairs at both ends**. At the top, twelve inches beyond the last step. At the bottom, at least one tread's length past the final step, running level. The reason is the moment you step off. A rail that stops exactly where the stairs stop lets go of you at the precise instant your weight transfers — which is when people fall.

WHAT TO BUY

Promenaïd handrail kit **[\$\$]** — the one that solves the stud problem. Its brackets clip and twist-lock anywhere along a channel in the rail, so you fix them where the studs actually are instead of measuring first and hoping. They pivot to any stair angle, each one is rated to five hundred pounds, the rail cuts to length with an ordinary saw, and you can move a bracket later without patching the wall. Nearly three thousand reviews at 4.6. Sold by the section, so a full flight is several of these.

THSGRT round wall-mounted rail, 5 feet **[\$\$]** — a plain steel tube **one and a half inches across**, which sits squarely inside the range above, with two brackets and a 440-pound rating. A quarter of the price of the Promenaïd and it does the main job. Two hundred and fifty reviews at 4.5, the thinnest evidence of the three.

Dolibest wooden handrail, 10 feet **[\$\$]** — real wood with the brackets already mounted on the rail, three of them, five hundred pounds each. A whole flight in one piece, and it looks like part of the house rather than part of a hospital. Five hundred reviews at 4.6.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The rail is only as good as what is behind the wall. Brackets go into **studs**, not into drywall anchors — and the stud spacing decides where your brackets can go, not the other way around. If the studs fall awkwardly, the answer is a mounting board screwed into several studs with the rail fixed to that — a carpenter will suggest it before you do.

Count the brackets. You want one roughly every four feet and one near each end, and you want the kind where your hand can slide past without letting go. Brackets that sit under the rail let a hand run the whole length; brackets that wrap over the top stop it.

Wood or metal is a matter of taste and both are fine. What is not fine is anything you cannot close your fingers around.

SEARCH TERMS

"stair handrail kit with brackets" · "wall mounted handrail round" · "ADA handrail return".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ for the rail and brackets. A carpenter, two or three hours for a flight. This is worth hiring out unless you own a stud finder and trust it.

WHERE TO START

The staircase you use every day, on the side that is currently bare.

STEPS YOU HAVE TO FIND → STEPS YOU CAN SEE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Going down a flight, you are not looking at the stairs. You are looking at where the stairs end, and your feet are finding the treads by memory and by feel. That works perfectly until one tread is a different depth, or the light is behind you, or the carpet pattern hides where one step ends and the next begins — and then it does not work at all.

Why it got harder. Finding the edge of a step is a contrast problem, not a sharpness problem. Two things happened to make contrast harder: less light now reaches the back of the eye, because the pupil is smaller and the lens is denser, and the loss of contrast sensitivity that comes with age is **worse in dim light than in good light**. A staircase in the evening is the exact condition where the change shows up most.

So a set of stairs you have used for thirty years can become genuinely hard to read without anything being wrong with your eyes.

THE SWAP

Make the edge of each tread visibly different from the tread itself, and make the surface grip.

WHAT TO BUY

MBIGM carpet stair treads, 15 pack **[\$\$]** — enough for a full flight, eight by thirty inches, and they grip without permanent glue, so they lift off without taking the finish with them and go in the washing machine. Nearly nine thousand reviews at 4.6.

COSY HOMEER treads, 4 pack **[\$]** — the same idea in fours, which is the right quantity if you are doing the top three steps and the bottom one rather than a whole staircase. Low profile, so a door at the bottom still clears them. Eight and a half thousand reviews at 4.7.

LifeGrip anti-slip traction tape, 4 inches by 38 feet **[\$]** — eighty-grit, which is the coarse kind, and rated from four below zero to a hundred and forty Fahrenheit, so it is the one for outdoor steps and

for a painted porch. Fifteen thousand reviews at 4.6, the largest body of evidence in this chapter.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Contrast beats brightness. A light strip on a dark stair, or a dark strip on a light stair, does more than doubling the bulb — and the grit tape comes in black, white and a glow-in-the-dark version, so you can pick whichever one your stairs are not. Whatever goes on the nose should be the opposite of what the stair already is.

Know what treads do and do not cover. Almost all of the adhesive ones are flat mats that sit on the tread and stop at the front edge — they do not wrap **the nose**, the lip that sticks out. The nose is where the foot lands and where the slip happens, so if you want the nose covered, that is a strip of grit tape along the front edge, laid after the mats. And whatever you use has to stay put: a stair tread that slides is worse than a bare stair, the same way a badly mounted grab bar is worse than no bar.

For tape, look for a **coarse grit** rather than the smooth rubbery kind, and clean the step with something that leaves no residue before you lay it down. Most failures are the surface, not the tape.

One thing to leave alone: do not put a loose rug at the top or the bottom of a flight. That is the one spot where a rug is a genuine hazard rather than a nuisance, because you land on it with your weight already moving.

SEARCH TERMS

"non slip stair treads carpet" · "anti slip stair tape outdoor" · "stair nosing high contrast".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ to **\$\$**. Yourself, an afternoon.

WHERE TO START

The bottom three steps and the top three. If you do nothing else, do the top ones — that is where a missed step has a whole flight underneath it.

THE LIP AT THE DOOR → A SLOPE YOU DO NOT NOTICE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A raised threshold is a trip hazard at exactly the moment your attention is elsewhere: keys in one hand, bag in the other, door swinging. It is also the single most common reason a walker or a wheelchair cannot get through a door that is otherwise wide enough — the doorway is fine, the floor is not.

What the standard allows, which tells you what is reasonable. In new construction the threshold maximum is **half an inch**, and anything over a quarter inch has to be beveled rather than square. In an existing or altered home the allowance goes up to **three quarters of an inch**, beveled on both sides.

Measure yours. Most interior thresholds are fine. Front doors, back doors and the door to a garage are the ones that usually are not — and a sliding-door track is often the worst in the house.

THE SWAP

A threshold ramp: a wedge of rubber or aluminum that turns the lip into a slope on one or both sides.

WHAT TO BUY

VEVOR cuttable threshold ramp, 1.6-inch rise **\$** — natural rubber, thirty-five inches wide and **trimmable with a saw**, which is what you want, because almost no doorway is a standard width. Textured surface for wet days. Eleven hundred reviews at 4.6.

BESEA threshold ramp, 3-inch rise **\$\$** — for a real step rather than a lip: a garage entry, a back door with one concrete stair. Rated to three and a half thousand pounds and it grips the floor rather than sliding on it. Two hundred reviews at 4.7. It weighs thirty-five pounds, so have it carried in.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Measure the **height of the lip** first and buy for that height, not for the door. Then check the **width** covers the full doorway with a little to spare on each side, because the one place you will catch it is the edge.

Rubber grips better and is quieter — aluminum is lighter and easier to move for cleaning. Either way it needs to sit flat without rocking, and outdoors it needs to be fixed down or it will move the first time something heavy crosses it.

While you are at the door, measure the **clear opening** — the actual gap with the door standing open at ninety degrees, not the frame. Thirty-two inches is the figure used for accessible doorways. If yours is under thirty inches and you ever expect to use a walker, there is a cheap trick worth knowing: swing-clear hinges move the door fully out of the opening and buy you about two inches for the price of the hinges, without touching the wall.

SEARCH TERMS

"rubber threshold ramp doorway" · "wheelchair threshold ramp adjustable" · "swing clear offset hinges".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$**. Yourself. The hinges are a screwdriver job and take about fifteen minutes a door.

WHERE TO START

The door you use most, which for most people is not the front one.

Outside: the steps, the path, and the ice

The ground outside your door does more damage than most rooms inside it. Falls on a walk, a driveway or in a garage account for about six in a hundred of the ones that reach an emergency room, and the yard for another five and a half. Together that is more than the kitchen and the living room combined.

It also has a feature no room indoors has, which is weather.

The steps. Outdoor steps are usually worse than indoor ones: fewer of them, so people think they do not count; often no rail at all; and made of something that changes character when it is wet. Three steps with no rail is not a small staircase — it is a staircase with nothing to hold.

Meranti aluminum handrail **\$\$\$** — made for outside: aluminum rather than steel so it does not rust, and it comes with what you need to fix it to concrete, brick or stucco as well as to wood. Cuts to length. Three hundred and seventy reviews at 4.7.

VEVOR pipe handrail, 6 feet (\$) — the cheapest thing in this chapter that is a real handrail. Steel pipe just over an inch and a quarter across, screwed straight into the wall, 440 pounds a section. Five hundred reviews at 4.4. It looks industrial, which some people like and some do not.

A rail on outdoor steps is the same argument as indoors, with one addition: get one rated for outdoor use and bolted into the concrete or the masonry, not screwed to wooden cladding. If the steps are concrete and you are unsure, this is a small job for a handyman and a quick one.

The path. Walk it in daylight and look for three things: a lip where something has lifted a slab, a section that stays wet and grows a film of green, and the place where the surface changes. Slab lifts get ground down or the slab gets relaid. The green film is algae, and it is as slippery as ice — it comes off with a proper outdoor cleaner and a stiff brush, and it comes back every year.

The ice. Cold countries produce a particular kind of accident: the person who has been careful all winter, steps out once for the mail, and lands on a patch they could not see.

Yaktrax Walk (\$) — coils rather than spikes, wrapped around a rubber sling you stretch over your shoe. Coils are the right choice for a path, a sidewalk and packed snow, and they are far less alarming to walk on than points. **Twenty-seven thousand reviews at 4.4**, which makes this the most-reviewed product in the entire book.

Cimkiz cleats, nineteen spikes (\$) — actual steel spikes, which bite into hard ice the way coils do not, and a rubber that stays flexible far below freezing. Ten thousand reviews at 4.6. The trade is real: spikes on a tiled hallway or a wooden floor are a hazard in their own right, so these come off at the door, every time.

And something to put down.

Safe Paw, 8-pound jug (\$) — salt-free and chloride-free, works to two below zero Fahrenheit, and it is gentler on concrete, paws and shoes than rock salt. Eleven and a half thousand reviews at 4.5. Buy the **eight-pound** size rather than the thirty-five-pound bucket, for reasons this whole book is about.

Snow Joe Enviro Blend (\$) — green-coated crystals that show you where you have already been — useful when you are spreading in poor light and cannot tell treated ground from untreated. Works to ten below, and it is formulated to be less corrosive to concrete and metal. Fifteen thousand reviews at 4.4.

Traction cleats that stretch over your ordinary shoes are the cheapest insurance in this chapter. The condition is that they live **by the door**, on a hook, not in a drawer in the garage — the same rule as the stool in the kitchen. A pair you have to go and find is a pair you will not put on.

Keep a tub of ice melt inside the door rather than in the shed, and put it down **before** the freeze rather than after. And there is no shame in the arrangement half the neighborhood already has: somebody younger does the path, and you pay them or you feed them.

Search terms: "outdoor handrail for steps" · "ice cleats for shoes seniors" · "pet safe ice melt".

FUMBLING AT THE CAR → SOMETHING SOLID TO PUSH AGAINST

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Getting out of a car is one of the hardest ordinary movements there is, and it goes unmentioned because it happens in a parking lot rather than in a house. You are low, you are twisted, your feet are outside and your weight is inside — and there is nothing to hold except a door that moves.

Most people solve it by hauling on the door frame or the steering wheel. Both of those work until the day they do not.

THE SWAP

A handle that locks into the door latch on the frame — the metal loop the door closes onto — and gives you a solid vertical grip exactly where you need one. It goes in your bag or your pocket and it works in any car, including other people's.

WHAT TO BUY

Stander HandyBar  — the original of this category and still the one to beat. Nine inches of non-slip grip that drops into the door striker, weighs about a pound, lives in the glove box, and has a window breaker and a seatbelt cutter built into the end. Five and a half thousand reviews at 4.6.

KOUNATSURI handles, 2 pack  — forged steel rated to four hundred pounds, with a padded sleeve, and two in the box so one can live in each car. Seven thousand reviews at 4.6, at half the price. Same emergency tools in the end.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The handle has to fit **the striker**, which is the U-shaped loop on the door frame. Nearly all cars have one and nearly all these handles fit, but look at yours before you order, because a few newer models have a covered latch. Check the **weight rating** and buy well above your own weight — you will be putting a sideways load on it, not a straight-down one.

About the turning cushion, and why there is no link to one. The other half of this problem is the twist: a swivel cushion lets you sit down first and then rotate your legs out together, instead of

turning your spine while your feet hunt for the ground. It is a good idea. The trouble is that no product in the category holds up. Every one on sale sits between three and a half and four stars, across thousands of reviews, and the complaints are consistent — they slide on the seat, or they lift you so high that your head meets the door frame. Everything else recommended in this book is above four and a half stars, and this is where that standard bites. If you want to try one, go to a mobility shop and sit on it before you pay. I am not sending you to a link for something I would not buy myself.

SEARCH TERMS

"car door handle assist standing aid" · "swivel seat cushion car" · "car cane support handle".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

. Nothing to install.

WHERE TO START

The car you get into most. If you are usually the passenger, that side is where it goes.

The three that are not products

Some of what this chapter is about cannot be bought in a box, and the honest thing is to say what they cost.

A ramp. For a doorway with steps up to it, a proper ramp is the change that reopens the house. The specification is public and it is stricter than people expect: no steeper than **one inch of rise for every twelve inches of length**, at least thirty-six inches wide, with a flat landing at the top and the bottom at least five feet long, another landing anywhere it turns, and a handrail on both sides once the rise passes six inches. A three-step porch needs somewhere around twenty-four feet of ramp, which is why so many homemade ones are too steep to use. Modular aluminum systems start in the hundreds and go up fast; a built ramp is a contractor job. If you are outside the United States, the slope rules where you live may be different — some countries are stricter for longer ramps — so use the American figure as a floor and ask locally before you build.

A stairlift. A chair on a rail up the side of the staircase. Straight-flight models are the cheap end and cost in the low thousands installed — a curved staircase needs a custom rail and roughly doubles that. Renting is possible in many places and is worth asking about if the need might be

temporary — after surgery, for example. This is the change that gets a whole floor of a house back, and it is the one people delay longest, usually because of how it looks.

A wider door. If a doorway is genuinely too narrow, widening it is carpentry and sometimes structural work. Try the hinges first. If that is not enough, get somebody who can tell you whether the wall is holding anything up before you get any quotes.

None of the three is in the price range of the rest of this book, and none of them belongs on a page of links. What they belong to is the money chapter, because in several countries the first two are partly paid for by somebody other than you — and in the United States they may be deductible as a medical expense. That is worth a conversation before you assume the number you were quoted is the number you pay.

PAUSE & REFLECT

When was the last time you decided not to go somewhere, and the reason was the getting there rather than the thing itself?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

Is there a room in this house you have not been into in the last month?

If a friend asked you to come over on a wet evening in January, what is the first obstacle you would picture?

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

Falls on stairs go down with age because people stop using stairs. That is a lost floor, not a solved problem.

A rail on both sides is the change with the most evidence behind it and the least fuss attached to it.

The front door sets the size of your life. Everything else in this book is about rooms; this is about whether you go out.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, stand at the bottom of your stairs and put a hand out to each side. If one hand closes on nothing, you have found your first job.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

Stairs are the argument people reach for first, because a staircase is easy to point at and hard to defend.

What you can say:
"The stairs are a fair question. I'm putting a second rail up this month — ask me again after that and I'll tell you honestly how it's going."

It concedes nothing and it answers the real worry, which is that the problem is being ignored. It also puts a date on the conversation, which is what stops it being reopened every Sunday.

8

PAPERS & KEYS

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHERE THINGS LIVE

A house that remembers for you

You are at the door with your coat on and the keys are not on the hook.

They are not in yesterday's pocket either, or in the bowl, or on the counter by the kettle. You go back through the rooms. You find them eventually — on the arm of the chair, where you put them down to answer the phone — and the whole thing has cost you four minutes.

The four minutes are not the problem.

The problem is the second thought, the one that arrived somewhere around minute two and is still there now. It has nothing to do with the keys. You have been having it more often lately, and you have not mentioned it to anybody.

A search is not evidence

Start with that thought, because it will get in the way of everything practical.

Losing track of an object you set down while doing something else is not a memory failure. It is what happens when attention is somewhere else at the moment of putting down — and attention was somewhere else because the phone rang. You did not forget where the keys were. You never encoded it in the first place, because you were listening to your daughter.

That happens to everyone at every age. What changes with age is not the frequency. What changes is what you do with it afterward.

At thirty-five, a hunt for the keys is an annoyance. At seventy, the same hunt comes with a running commentary, and the commentary is far more expensive than the four minutes. It makes you tired. It makes you careful about mentioning it. And over time it makes you smaller in front of other people, because the effort of not seeming to search becomes its own job.

So the aim of this chapter is not to help you remember better. It is to build a house where remembering is not required.

The house should hold the information

Here is the shift. Most of what you carry around in your head about this house is **information the house could hold for you**, and most of it is held in your head only because that is how it has always been.

Where the spare key is. Which breaker is the kitchen. When the furnace was last serviced. What the pills are for. Which of two nearly identical bottles is the one you take at night. Your neighbor's number, the one you have never written down because you always call it from your phone.

Every one of those is a small tax, paid daily, on a budget that has other demands on it. And most of them can be moved out of your head and into a hook, a label or a page — permanently, for very little money.

There is a second reason, and it is the one people usually have not considered. Some of that information will need to be found by **somebody who is not you**, in a hurry, when you cannot tell them. A paramedic in your kitchen. A daughter on a plane. A locksmith, a plumber, a neighbor with your spare key. The version of this system that only works when you are there to explain it is half a system.

The rule, and it is the whole chapter

One place for each thing, and the place is where you use it — not where it looks tidy.

That second half is where most organizing advice goes wrong. Things get put where they belong in a diagram rather than where the hand reaches for them, and the system quietly collapses within a month because it is fighting how you actually move.

The scissors belong where you cut things, even if that is the kitchen and they are technically office scissors. The reading glasses belong wherever you read, which might mean three pairs rather than one good pair you keep losing. The spare batteries belong near the thing that eats batteries.

If you have ever set up a system and watched it fail, that is almost certainly why. It was somebody else's diagram.

PUTTING THINGS DOWN → A LANDING PLACE BY THE DOOR

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

The door is where the most-searched objects live: keys, phone, glasses, wallet, mail, the thing you must not forget on Thursday. It is also where you come in with your hands full and your attention on something else, which is precisely the moment you set something down in a place you will not remember.

THE SWAP

A defined surface and a set of hooks at the door, inside the first arm's reach — not a piece of furniture you have to cross the hall to reach.

WHAT TO BUY

Lwenki key and mail holder with shelf (\$) — paulownia wood, a shelf with a lip on it and large hooks underneath, which is the whole specification in one object. Nine thousand reviews at 4.7.

HRONRAD wall shelf with four hooks (\$) — solid wood, an L-shaped shelf so things cannot slide off the front, and four hooks. Cheaper, plainer, and deliberately small. Three thousand reviews at 4.6.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The shelf has to have a lip on it. A flat ledge lets things slide off the front and a deep bowl swallows them; a shallow shelf with a raised edge is the shape that holds keys and still lets you see what is there.

Hooks want to be **mounted at shoulder height or a little below**, so hanging a bag on one does not mean lifting it overhead. Screw them in — adhesive hooks fail with weight on them, usually in the third week, and usually with the coat on them.

And keep the surface **small on purpose**. A big shelf by the door becomes the place where all mail goes to die. Small enough to hold four objects is exactly right, because it forces the fifth one to go where it lives.

SEARCH TERMS

"entryway key holder with shelf" · "wall mounted key rack hooks" ·
"valet tray leather".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$. A screwdriver and twenty minutes.

WHERE TO START

The door you actually come in through, which for a lot of people is the one from the garage or the back.

THE SWAP**THE BATHROOM CABINET → A MEDICATION SYSTEM YOU CAN**

CHECK AT A GLANCE

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Most medication lives in an original bottle, in a cabinet, in a room you visit for other reasons. So the question *did I take it?* has no answer except memory, and the second question — *did I take it twice?* — has no answer at all.

If you take more than three things at different times of day, you are running a small logistics operation from a shelf that is not designed for it.

THE SWAP

A weekly or monthly organizer that makes the answer **visible** rather than remembered. The lid is open or it is closed. That is the entire mechanism, and it is why this works when reminders do not.

WHAT TO BUY

Ezy Dose push-button organizer, seven days, four times a day **\$** — the one to start with. The lids open with a **push button** rather than a fingernail, it has silicone feet so the tray does not skate across the counter while you work one-handed, and it carries the **Arthritis Foundation's ease-of-use commendation**, which is an outside body saying what the box says about itself. Seven thousand reviews at 4.4.

Fullicon extra-large weekly organizer **\$** — for a long list. Each day is its own removable strip with four latching compartments, big enough for capsules and fish oil rather than small tablets, and the latches hold if the thing goes in a bag. Fifteen hundred reviews at 4.7, the highest rating in this chapter.

Ezy Dose pop-out extra-large weekly **\$** — the same maker's other mechanism: each day pops out of the tray so you can carry one day rather than the week. Worth knowing about if you are out of the house for long stretches. Nine hundred reviews at 4.7.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Count your times of day honestly. A **seven-day, one-compartment** box is right if everything is taken at once, and useless if it is not. Two or four compartments per day cost very little more.

Then check you can open it. This is where the category fails older hands, and it fails them in both directions: some lids need a fingernail and a pinch, and some are so loose that the box empties itself in a bag. **Push-button lids** are the ones that work with stiff fingers. If you can, open one in a store before you commit.

Big print on the lids, and separate the morning and evening boxes by color if you take both. And put the box where the act happens — by the kettle, by the toothbrush — rather than in the medicine cabinet, for the same reason as everything else in this chapter.

One thing that is not a product. Ask a pharmacist to review everything you take, including the ones you buy yourself, in one appointment, with all the bottles in a bag. It is usually free, it takes twenty minutes, and it is the single most useful thing in this chapter. Several common medications affect balance, blood pressure on standing, and sleep — and the interactions between them are exactly what a pharmacist is trained to see and what no organizer will ever catch. Do that before you buy a box to put them in.

SEARCH TERMS

"weekly pill organizer 4 times a day large" · "monthly pill organizer with push button" · "pill box for arthritic hands".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$. Yourself, on a Sunday.

THE SWAP

REMEMBERING WHICH ONE → LABELS BIG ENOUGH TO READ

AT ARM'S LENGTH

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A surprising amount of daily effort goes into telling nearly identical things apart: two white bottles, three remote controls, the freezer drawer with the soup in it, the key that opens the shed.

You have solved most of them by memory, by position, or by squinting. All three are fragile, and none of them survives being tired.

Why the squinting got worse. This is the contrast problem again, in a different setting. Printed labels on medication are small, low-contrast, and usually gray on white — a combination that is hard to read in good light and close to impossible in a bathroom at six in the morning.

THE SWAP

Large, high-contrast labels, made by you, in your words.

The words matter more than the neatness. **"Blood pressure — morning"** is a better label than the drug's name, because the drug's name is what the pharmacy needs and the purpose is what you need. Label the breaker box by room rather than by circuit number. Label the freezer drawers. Label the key.

WHAT TO BUY

Brother P-Touch PTD220 **[\$\$]** — the standard machine, with a keyboard laid out like a typewriter and **laminated half-inch tape** that survives a bathroom and a freezer. Fifty-five hundred reviews at 4.5. The tape is the reason to pick this one; it is the most widely sold cartridge there is, so you can always get more.

SUPVAN E11 **[\$]** — two-thirds of the price, rechargeable rather than eating six batteries, and it prints from either the keyboard or a phone app if somebody is helping you set it up. Four thousand reviews at 4.5.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

Look for **tape width of at least half an inch** and a machine that prints large. Black on white is the most readable combination there is; white on clear looks better and reads worse. If the label goes anywhere near water — a bathroom, a freezer, a bottle you handle

with wet hands — make sure the tape is laminated, which is the standard for the main brands and not for the cheap cartridges.

And check what the refill cartridges cost before you buy the machine. That is where this category makes its money, and a cheap machine with expensive tape is the worse deal.

SEARCH TERMS

"label maker large print" · "laminated label tape half inch" · "large print medication labels".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$**. Yourself, an afternoon, and it is oddly satisfying.

THE SWAP

PAPERS IN SEVERAL PLACES → ONE FOLDER THAT SOMEBODY

ELSE COULD FIND

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

The documents that matter in an emergency are typically spread across a drawer, a shoebox, a filing cabinet, an email account and somebody's memory. You know roughly where each one is. That knowledge is not written down anywhere, and it is the part that fails exactly when it is needed.

THE SWAP

One folder, in one known place, containing copies rather than originals, plus a single page at the front that says where the originals are.

What goes in it. Your medication list, with doses. Your conditions and allergies. Your doctors, with phone numbers. Your insurance details. Your emergency contacts, with their relationship to you spelled out. Copies of the paperwork that says who speaks for you if you cannot — the names differ by country, and the money chapter has how to find out what yours is called. And the front page: where the deeds are, where the will is, who your lawyer is, which bank, and where the spare keys are.

The version that gets found. In much of the United States, emergency crews are trained to look on the refrigerator door. A program called the **File of Life** puts a bright magnetic envelope there with your medical details inside — many local fire departments hand them out free, and the crews know to check. Outside the United States this is not standard, and the question to ask your local ambulance service is simply: *"If I am unconscious in my kitchen, where will your crew look for my medical information?"* Whatever they answer, do that.

WHAT TO BUY

SentrySafe fire chest with carrying handle [\$\$] — for the originals. This is the one with a **real, independently classified rating**: UL classified for half an hour at 1,550 degrees, with a lifetime after-fire replacement guarantee. Twenty-two thousand reviews at 4.6, the most-reviewed product in this chapter.

ENGPOW fireproof document box [\$\$] — lighter, collapsible, water-resistant, and it holds letter and legal paper flat rather than folded. Six thousand reviews at 4.6. One honest note on the

labeling: the **5,200-degree figure on boxes like this one is the manufacturer describing its own material**, not an independent classification like the SentrySafe's. Both are sensible boxes; only one of them has been tested by somebody else.

Pendaflex expanding file pockets **\$** — the everyday folder, the one that is not locked. Reinforced, expands to five inches, and cheap enough to have one for the house and one to give your daughter. Three thousand reviews at 4.8, the best-rated thing in this chapter.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

A fire box is for originals, and its rating is the thing to read: **look for a stated fire rating in minutes at a stated temperature, and for the name of the body that classified it** — UL and ETL are the two you will see. A large temperature printed on the outside with no test behind it tells you what the material is made of, not how long your papers last. Add a separate water rating if you live anywhere that floods.

Do not lock the everyday folder. The whole purpose is that somebody can open it without you — a locked box with the key inside your purse defeats the exercise. Originals go in the fire box, copies go in the folder, and the folder lives somewhere a visitor would think to look.

Tell **two people** where it is. One is not enough, because the one may be with you when whatever happens, happens.

SEARCH TERMS

"fireproof document box with handle" · "accordion file folder letter size" · "File of Life refrigerator magnet".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ to **\$\$**. An afternoon, once, and then twenty minutes each January to bring it up to date.

HUNTING → ASKING THE THING WHERE IT IS

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Some objects leave the system no matter how good the system is, because they travel: keys, wallet, the phone itself, the remote, a bag that was in the car.

THE SWAP

A coin-sized tracker on the things that walk off. You press a button on your phone, the tracker makes a noise, and you follow the noise. It also works in the other direction, which is the part people do not expect: press the tracker and your phone rings, even on silent.

WHAT TO BUY

Reyke key finder with remote **\$** — **this one needs no phone at all**, which for a lot of people is the difference between using it and not. Four color-coded tags and a remote: press the blue button, the blue tag beeps at eighty decibels and flashes a light. The batteries are ordinary coin cells you can replace. Twelve thousand reviews at 4.4.

Apple AirTag, single **\$** — for an iPhone, and only for an iPhone. It works with the Find My app already on the phone, needs no account setting up, and its battery is a coin cell you change once a year. Eleven thousand reviews at 4.5.

Tile Pro **\$\$** — the one to get if your phone is an Android, or if you want the same tag to work whoever's phone is in the room. It is the loudest of the phone-based tags, which is the specification that actually matters under a cushion. Four thousand reviews at 4.4.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The one thing to get right is **which phone you have**, because these do not cross over. If your phone is an iPhone, the Apple tracker works with the app already on it and needs nothing set up. If it is an Android phone, you need one built for Android. Buying the wrong one is the single most common mistake here.

Then check two practical things: how **loud** it is, because the quiet ones are useless in a coat pocket under a cushion, and whether the

battery is replaceable — a year is typical, and a sealed one becomes trash rather than a battery change.

Honest limit: a tracker finds things in the house and in the car. It is not a system for finding a person, and it is not designed for that. The chapter on living alone has what is.

SEARCH TERMS

"key finder with remote no phone" · "bluetooth key finder loud" · "item tracker for android" · "airtag key ring".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$**. Ten minutes on the phone with somebody patient if it is your first one.

And the part that is a conversation

There is one item in this chapter you cannot buy, and it is the most valuable.

Somebody else has to know how the house works. Not the details of your finances, and not before you want them to — just the map. Where the folder is. Which breaker is which. That the water heater needs the switch in the closet turned on first. Where the main water shutoff is. Who does the gutters.

Most people carry all of that alone and think of handing it over as the beginning of losing control. It is the opposite. Written down and shared, it stops being leverage anybody can use in a conversation about whether you should move, because the honest answer becomes: *the house is documented, and here is the folder.*

Pick one person. Walk them round once. Point at things. It takes half an hour and it removes an entire category of worry from somebody who loves you.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

What did you look for last, and how long did it take?

Which object in
this house has no
fixed home at all?

If somebody had to find your medication list tonight,
without you, where would they look — and would it be
there?

*There are no right
answers. This is just
for you.*

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

A search is not evidence. Putting something down while
distracted is not a memory problem, it is an attention
problem, and it happens at every age.

One place for each
thing, and the place
is where you use it
— not where it
looks tidy.

Half of this is for you. The other half is for the person who
has to find something when you cannot tell them.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, put one hook by the door and hang the keys on it.
Only the keys. Everything else can wait.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

Forgetting is the argument people are most frightened of
and least willing to say out loud, so it arrives sideways — as a
comment about the keys, or about the appointment you
moved.

What you can say:
*"I've written down
how the house runs
— the folder's on the
shelf in the hall.
Have a look at it,
and tell me what's
missing."*

It answers a worry about capacity with a demonstration of
capacity, which no amount of insisting can do. And it gives
the worried person something useful to hold, which is
usually what they were after.



CHAPTER NINE

THE BAD DAY

Set the house up for your worst day, not your average one

It is four in the morning and you have a stomach bug.

Not a serious one — the kind that is over in a day and a half, and that you have had a dozen times in your life. But right now the bathroom is further away than it was yesterday, the floor is colder, and standing up from sitting takes a count of three and a hand on the wall.

You want water. The water is in the kitchen, at the other end of the house, and getting there and back is a project.

By morning you are fine. What stays with you is the arithmetic you did in the dark, and how the house answered it.

The bad day is not rare. It is unscheduled

Everybody has them. A virus, a migraine, a bad night's sleep on top of a bad week — the days after a procedure, the two weeks after a fall that did not break anything, the reaction to a new medication while your body works out what to do with it.

Count honestly and most people find ten or fifteen days a year when they are operating at half strength. That is not an emergency — it is a normal part of a year, and it has been a normal part of every year of your life.

What changes is the margin. At forty, half strength still cleared the height of every ordinary task in the house, so a bad day was unpleasant and nothing more. Later on, the same bad day drops you below the height of some of them — and the house, designed around your average day, suddenly asks for things you cannot give it.

So this chapter is about a specific and slightly odd question. **Not what you would do in a disaster. What your ordinary day quietly depends on, and what happens on the day that thing is gone.**

The method: take one thing away

Sit somewhere comfortable and run your normal day through your head. Then remove one capability and see what breaks.

If I could not use the stairs today. Where is everything I need? Is there a bathroom on this floor? Where would I sleep?

If I could not stand at the counter for more than two minutes. What do I eat? Is any of it in this house right now?

If I could not leave the house for ten days. Do I run out of anything that matters? Which ten days of the year would be the worst ones for that to happen?

If the power went off for two days in February. How warm does this house stay? What do I do about the dark? What stops working that I had not thought of — the well pump, the garage door, the phone charger, the stairlift?

If I could not lift anything heavier than a kettle for six weeks. Who brings the groceries in? Where does the cat litter come from?

You are not predicting anything — you are finding the single points of failure in an ordinary week. There are usually three or four, and most of them are cheap to fix in advance and expensive to fix on the day.

The two-week number

There is one figure worth knowing, because it is different from the one everybody else is given.

The standard advice for households is three to seven days of supplies. For older adults, the national preparedness guidance says **two weeks** — of water, of food, of the ordinary things — plus **at least thirty days of medication** and an up-to-date medical list.

The reason for the difference is not that older people are frailer — it is that recovery services reach the easiest addresses first, that more of the supply chain is medication rather than food, and that two weeks is how long a bad winter can cut a road.

Thirty days of medication is the part people find hardest, because prescriptions are usually written for less. It is a conversation with your doctor and your insurance, not a purchase, and it is worth having before you need it. Ask specifically for an emergency supply or a ninety-day fill; the phrase varies by country and both of them exist.

THE WELL-STOCKED KITCHEN → A SHELF YOU COULD LIVE OFF

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A kitchen full of food is not the same thing as a kitchen you can eat from on a bad day. Most of what is in yours needs standing, chopping, lifting a pan, and forty minutes. On the day you have none of those, a full kitchen and an empty one feel identical — and you eat toast, or you eat nothing.

THE SWAP

One shelf, or one box, holding two weeks of things that require **no cooking, no lifting and no decisions**. Not disaster rations. The things you would actually want if you felt terrible.

Soup you can heat in a mug. Crackers. Canned fruit with a pull tab. Peanut butter. Shelf-stable milk. Tea bags and honey. The exact cookies you like. Electrolyte packets, which matter more than people think when you have not kept anything down.

Two rules keep it working. **Label the shelf so it does not get eaten** — this is the one place in the book where a label is about willpower rather than eyesight. And **eat it down once a year** and replace it, which is easier to remember if you tie it to something: the day the clocks change, or your birthday.

WHAT TO BUY

Campbell's Sipping Soup, tomato (\$) — soup in a cup you drink from. No bowl, no spoon, no pan, ninety seconds in the microwave. That combination is the entire point of this shelf. Two thousand reviews at 4.7.

Lipton Cup-a-Soup, chicken noodle (\$) — the other kind, and worth having both: this one needs only **hot water**, so it still works when the power is off and you can heat water in a kettle on a gas burner. Fifteen hundred reviews at 4.5, and it costs about as much as a coffee.

DripDrop electrolyte packets, variety pack (\$\$) — packets you stir into a glass of water. These are made for actual dehydration rather than for exercise, which is a different formulation, and they

are the thing to reach for after a night of not keeping anything down. Nearly thirteen thousand reviews at 4.6.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Everything on the shelf has to open **without a tool and without grip**. Pull tabs, screw caps you have already loosened once, packets rather than jars. Test one of each when it arrives, on a good day, so you find out now rather than then.

Portion size matters more than quantity. A large can you cannot finish becomes a leftover that needs the refrigerator and a container and a decision. Single servings are worth the extra money here specifically.

And buy things you like. A shelf of food you are dreading is a shelf you will not touch, and then you will be making toast at three in the morning instead.

SEARCH TERMS

"shelf stable single serve soup" · "electrolyte powder packets" · "canned fruit easy open pull tab".

**COST AND WHO
DOES IT**

\$ to **\$\$** once, then a top-up once a year.

WHERE TO START

The soup and the electrolytes. Those two cover the most common bad day there is.

THE KITCHEN FAUCET → WATER WITHIN REACH OF THE BED

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

On the night described at the top of this chapter, the distance between you and a glass of water was the whole problem. Dehydration makes dizziness worse, dizziness makes the walk to the kitchen worse — and the two of them feed each other at exactly the hour when you are least able to interrupt them.

It is also the ordinary answer to a much less ordinary situation. If the power goes out or a pipe freezes, water stored in the house is what you have.

THE SWAP

Two things: something that keeps water cold beside your bed every night, and a stored supply somewhere cool for the week nothing comes out of the faucet.

WHAT TO BUY

Stanley IceFlow with flip straw, 16 oz  — you press the button and the straw comes up, so it opens with one hand and drinks lying down without being tipped. Vacuum insulated, so water put beside the bed at ten is still cold at four. Eight thousand reviews at 4.7.

WaterStorageCube collapsible container with spigot, 5.3 gallons  — it folds flat when empty, which is why this one gets stored instead of meant-to-be-stored, and the spigot means you pour from it without lifting it. Nearly seventeen thousand reviews at 4.4. Two of these is most of a week for one person.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

For the bedside, the whole specification is that **you can open it one-handed, in the dark, lying down, without spilling it on the bed**. A screw cap fails all four. Look for a push-button or flip lid and a body you can hold with a weak grip, and fill it every night as part of going to bed rather than as a special measure.

For storage, count on **a gallon per person per day** and work out what two weeks looks like on a shelf. It is more than people expect. If that is too much to store or too heavy to move, store what you

can and add a water filter bottle to the list, which turns a questionable supply into a drinkable one and weighs nothing.

SEARCH TERMS

"insulated water bottle one handed lid" · "emergency water storage container" · "water filter bottle".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$. Today.

Heat, which is the weather that does the damage

Cold gets the attention — heat does the harm.

The reason is physical and it is worth knowing plainly. **An aging body adjusts more slowly to sudden changes in temperature**, and several common chronic conditions — along with several very common medications — interfere with how the body regulates heat and how much it sweats. That is the national public health agency describing it, and the practical meaning is that you can be in trouble in a hot house before you feel hot.

Their advice, almost word for word, because it is short and it surprises people:

Spend as much time as you can in air conditioning. If you do not have it at home, that is not a reason to stay put — call your local health department or find a cooled public space. Libraries, malls and community centers are the usual ones — and in many places there is a published list.

Do not use the stove or the oven during a heat wave. That is the recommendation that people find strangest, and it is there because cooking heats a small house faster than anything else you will do that day.

Drink water without waiting to be thirsty. Thirst arrives late.

What to buy.

DREO standing oscillating fan **\$\$** — large blades turning slowly, which is the combination that moves air without the noise, and it oscillates across a whole room rather than pointing at one chair. Seventeen thousand reviews at 4.7.

Levoit tower fan **\$\$** — narrower, cheaper, and it takes up about a foot of floor — a real consideration in a bedroom that is already full. Fourteen thousand reviews at 4.4.

Sukeen cooling towels, 4 pack **\$** — wet one, wring it out, put it around the back of your neck. It is the oldest trick there is and it works because the blood going to your head passes close to the surface there. Twenty-eight thousand reviews at 4.5, and they cost almost nothing. Keep one in the refrigerator in August.

Why these — and what to check if you buy anywhere else.

A fan moves air, which helps a great deal up to a point, and above a certain temperature it stops helping and starts simply moving hot air over you. The practical rule: a fan plus a wet towel on the back of the neck works; a fan on its own in a very hot room is not a plan. If the house cannot be cooled, the plan is to be somewhere else for the afternoon.

For a bedroom fan, the specification that matters is **quiet**, because the one you turn off at night is the one that does nothing. Look at the stated noise level if there is one, and prefer a larger fan turning slowly to a small one turning fast.

Search terms: "quiet tower fan bedroom" · "cooling towel neck" · "room thermometer large display".

Cost and who does it. **\$** to **\$\$**.

Cold, dark, and the day the power stops

A power outage is a bad day with a particular shape — everything works, then nothing does, and the things that stop are not the ones you listed.

Make the list now, on paper. In most houses it includes the heating, even a gas system, because the controls are electric. It includes water if you are on a well. It includes the garage door, the security system, the stairlift, the electric recliner, the phone once its charge runs out, and the internet that your telephone may now run through.

Two things to do that cost nothing. Keep a **landline telephone that plugs into the wall and needs no power**, if that is still possible where you live, because a cordless handset is useless in a cut. And if you depend on any medical equipment that runs on electricity, ask your power company about their **priority customer register** — at least one major utility runs one, giving advance warning of planned cuts and a reduced rate, with a doctor's certification. Not every company has one, so the thing to do is ask rather than assume.

What to buy.

Etekcity LED lanterns, 2 pack (\$) — ordinary AA batteries, collapse to turn on, and they light a whole room rather than a spot. **Fifty thousand reviews at 4.7**, which is the strongest evidence behind any product in this book. Put one by the bed and one in the kitchen.

FosPower emergency weather radio (\$) — NOAA weather alerts, AM and FM, and it runs off its battery, a solar panel or a hand crank, so it is never left with a dead battery. It also charges a phone from the crank, slowly, which is the feature you hope never to need. Thirty-eight thousand reviews at 4.6.

Kidde carbon monoxide detector, plug-in with battery backup (\$) — plugs into an outlet and keeps working on the battery when the power goes. Thirty-six thousand reviews at 4.7. One on every floor, and the one in the bedroom is the one that matters.

INIU power bank, 20,000 mAh (\$) — about four full phone charges, and it is the size of a paperback. Charge it twice a year whether or not anything has happened. Twenty-nine thousand reviews at 4.6.

Why these — and what to check if you buy anywhere else.

Candles are not the answer and it is worth saying so directly. A battery lantern gives more light, does not fall over, and does not set fire to the house at the exact moment when calling for help is hardest.

For a flashlight or a lantern, buy the kind that takes **ordinary batteries you already have**, and keep the batteries with it rather than in a drawer somewhere else. Rechargeable is fine as a second one and a poor choice as the only one — a power outage is precisely when it will be dead.

A **battery-powered radio** sounds old-fashioned until the cell network goes down with the power, which it does. The hand-crank ones double as a phone charger.

And a **carbon monoxide alarm** on every floor, checked when you check the smoke alarms. Kidde and First Alert are the two names you will see and both are fine; what matters is that it has a **battery backup**, because a detector that dies with the power is a detector that misses the hours you bought it for. This belongs in this chapter rather than any other because cold weather and power failures are when people bring heat into a house in ways the house was not designed for.

Search terms: "battery powered lantern LED" · "hand crank emergency radio" · "carbon monoxide detector plug in" · "power bank for phone".

Cost and who does it. (\$) One order.

Where to start. The lantern and the carbon monoxide alarm.

The part that is not equipment

Two things here are worth more than everything above, and neither of them costs anything.

Decide now what "a bad week" means and who hears about it. The failure people describe afterward is almost never the equipment. It is the three days of saying nothing because it did not feel serious enough to mention — followed by the call that could have come on day one. So set the rule in advance, out loud, with one specific person: *if I have not been out of the house in three days, I will tell you.* A rule agreed in advance is much easier to follow than a decision made while feeling terrible.

And write down what a bad day needs. One page, on the inside of a cabinet door. Where the soup shelf is. Which number to call for the doctor after hours. What you take for a migraine and where it lives. Who has a key. What the cat eats. You will not want to work any of that out on the day, and neither will anybody helping you.

That page is the same idea as the folder in the last chapter, for the same reason: a system that only works when you are well enough to explain it is not finished.

PAUSE & REFLECT

When was your last bad day, and what was the hardest ten minutes of it?

What does your ordinary day depend on that you have never thought of as a dependency?

Who would notice, and how long would it take them?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

Bad days are not rare. They are unscheduled, and there are ten or fifteen a year.

Two weeks of supplies and thirty days of medication, which is more than the standard advice given to everybody else, and for structural reasons rather than fragile ones.

Heat does more damage than cold, an aging body adapts to it more slowly, and the first move is to be somewhere cooler rather than to endure it.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, put six single-serving soups and a box of electrolyte packets on one shelf, and write the date on the shelf.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

Nothing produces this conversation faster than a bad week that somebody else witnessed. They saw you at half strength and they have been thinking about it ever since.

What you can say:
"That week was rough. I've sorted out the things that made it rough — come and look at the shelf, and tell me what you'd add."

The difference between a person who had a bad week and a person who cannot cope is preparation, and preparation is visible. Show them the shelf.

WHO KNOWS YOU'RE ALL RIGHT TODAY

Living alone, on purpose

No one is coming today.

There is nothing wrong — it is Tuesday, everybody is busy, and there is no reason for anyone to come. You will have a perfectly good day — the radio, the crossword, a walk if it stays dry, a phone call in the evening if your daughter remembers.

And if something happened at ten past nine this morning, the first person who would know is the one who calls in the evening, and only if they call.

That is not a sad fact. It is a structural one, and it has a solution that takes about an hour to set up.

Living alone is the ordinary case, not the exception

About twenty-eight in every hundred Americans over sixty-five live alone. Among women it climbs sharply with age: **twenty-seven in a hundred between sixty-five and seventy-four, and forty-three in a hundred past seventy-five.**

Nearly one in two. Whatever this chapter sounds like, it is not addressed to a small unlucky group. It is addressed to the majority of women who reach their late seventies, and most of them chose it and would choose it again.

The choosing is the point. Living alone on purpose is a different thing from being left alone, and the whole of this chapter is about keeping it the first one.

The best piece of research in this book

A study followed one hundred and ten people over the age of ninety for a year, with fall diaries, phone calls and visits, and asked a question most research skips: not just *did you fall*, but *what happened next, and did you call anyone?*

Read the findings in order, because the order is the argument.

Eighty-two percent of the falls happened when the person was alone. Not most. Nearly all.

Of the people who fell, eighty percent could not get up by themselves after at least one of those falls. And **thirty percent spent an hour or more on the floor.**

So far this reads like an advertisement for an alarm button. Here is the part that is not.

Of the falls where somebody was alone and could not get up, ninety-nine percent of those people already had an alarm. A pendant, a cord, a button. They had bought it, or a daughter had.

And in eighty percent of those falls, they did not press it.

When the alarm was used — twenty-eight falls — only one or two ended in more than an hour on the floor.

So the device works. The device is not the problem. **The problem is the twenty seconds in which a person on their own floor decides whether they are the sort of person who presses it.**

One caution about those numbers, because it is only fair. This was a study of people over ninety, which is the oldest group there is, and the rates would be lower at seventy. What transfers is not the percentages. What transfers is the mechanism — the gap between owning the thing and using it — and there is no reason to think that gap is smaller at seventy. If anything it is wider, because at seventy you are more certain you do not need it.

Three reasons it does not get pressed, in their own words

The researchers asked. The answers are short and every one of them has a fix.

They have it, but they do not wear it.

"I have got one but I don't have to wear it yet, I just hang it on the back of the chair there."

I don't have to wear it yet. The pendant is not a device in that sentence, it is a category, and agreeing to wear it means agreeing to be in the category. So it lives on the chair.

They take it off at night.

"I'd already taken it off ready for bed and put it on the bedside table so then I couldn't reach it."

That woman lost her balance getting undressed and was on the floor all night, until the morning, when she finally got the attention of somebody delivering a newspaper. The alarm was on the table, four feet away.

They are wearing it and they decide not to use it.

"I didn't want to use the call alarm, although I was wearing it, for fear of being taken into hospital."

That is the most important sentence in this book. She was not confused and she had not forgotten it was there. She made a calculation — floor versus hospital — and the floor won.

You cannot solve that one with a product. You solve it by deciding, in advance, on a day when you feel fine, what the rule is. Write it down if it helps: *if I am on the floor and cannot get up within five minutes, I press it. That is the rule, and it is not a decision I make on the floor.*

An hour on the floor costs you far more than an afternoon in an emergency room, and it makes the conversation about whether you can stay here much harder to win.

THE SWAP

A PENDANT ON THE CHAIR → SOMETHING YOU ARE ALREADY

WEARING

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

Everything above. An alarm you have to remember to put on is an alarm that is somewhere else at the moment it is needed — in the bathroom, in the night, in the garden.

THE SWAP

Put the function into an object you already wear all day and do not take off, or into an object that is in every room already.

There are three honest routes, and which one is right depends on things only you know.

One: a smartwatch with fall detection. It is on your wrist in the shower and in bed. It notices a hard fall by itself and asks whether you are all right, and if you do not answer it calls for help and sends your location. It is not sold as a medical alarm, which is exactly why people wear it.

Two: a monitored medical alert. A pendant or wristband with a button that reaches a staffed call center, usually for a monthly fee. It is the most reliable route if you are not comfortable with a phone, and the one that works if you cannot speak — the operator can hear you, and send help whether or not you answer. There is no link to one below, deliberately: these are bought directly from the monitoring companies, and the versions sold on Amazon carry a few dozen reviews each, which is not enough for me to tell you one is good. The criteria are below and they are what to take into the phone call.

Three: no subscription at all. A button that calls a list of numbers you chose, or a simple phone with a large emergency button on the back. You pay once. The trade is that it rings your daughter rather than a dispatcher, and if she is in a meeting it rings the next name on the list.

WHAT TO BUY

Apple Watch SE **\$\$\$** — around two hundred and fifty dollars, which is the most expensive thing recommended anywhere in this book, and it is here because it is the only fall-detection device with a serious body of evidence behind it: thirteen thousand reviews at 4.6. It detects a hard fall, taps your wrist, asks if you are all right,

and if you do not answer in a minute it calls emergency services and sends your location to your contacts. It needs an iPhone. It is also a watch, which is the reason people wear it and keep wearing it.

Samsung Galaxy Watch [\$\$\$] — the same function for an Android phone, at about a hundred and eighty-five dollars. Eight thousand reviews at 4.6. Fall detection has to be switched on in the settings, which is a five-minute job for whoever sets it up with you and is easy to leave undone.

A caregiver pager, two buttons and a receiver [\$] — the cheap route, and honest about what it is. You press a waterproof button, a plug-in chime sounds wherever it is — the next room, upstairs, or a neighbor's kitchen if they are within range. No subscription, no phone, nothing to set up. Sixteen hundred reviews at 4.6. It reaches whoever is in range and no further, which makes it excellent if somebody is nearby and useless if they are not.

**WHY THESE —
AND WHAT TO
CHECK IF YOU
BUY ANYWHERE
ELSE**

Waterproof, or it is not the right device. The bathroom is where a great deal of this happens, and a device that comes off for the shower is off at the worst possible moment.

Check the range and check what it needs. Some pendants only work inside the house, near a base station. Some need a cell signal, so a house with a weak one rules them out. Some need a smartphone nearby to do anything at all.

Ask what the monthly fee actually covers, and whether there is a contract, and what happens if you cancel. This industry sells fear and some of it sells hard — a free trial that becomes a three-year contract is a known pattern, and the questions to ask are in writing before the equipment arrives. A device with no monthly fee is not worse; it is a different design, and for somebody with three reliable people nearby it can be better.

And whatever you buy, **ask how it gets charged and when.** A device charged overnight on the nightstand is a device that is not on you overnight, which is when the woman above fell. The good ones charge in an hour, or in the shower cradle, or they run a week on a coin cell.

SEARCH TERMS

"medical alert watch no monthly fee" · "fall detection smartwatch seniors" · "waterproof emergency call button for seniors".

COST AND WHO DOES IT

\$ to **\$\$\$** for the device, plus a monthly fee for the monitored kind. Somebody patient sets it up with you, once.

THE PHONE IN ANOTHER ROOM → THE PHONE ON YOU

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

A cordless handset on the kitchen counter is useless from the hall floor. And the modern version of the problem is worse, because a cell phone is heavier and lives in a bag.

THE SWAP

Carry it. That is it. But carrying it has to be effortless, or you will not.

WHAT TO BUY

CACOE phone lanyard, 2 pack (\$) — a plain adjustable strap that clips onto almost any phone case. Eleven thousand reviews at 4.4, and it costs less than lunch.

Doormoon universal phone lanyard (\$) — the same idea from another maker, with a patch that slides under the case so it works with a phone you already have. Four thousand reviews at 4.5.

Wisdompro breakaway lanyards, 2 pack (\$) — a different job, and one worth knowing about. If you wear anything on a cord around your neck — a pendant alarm, a key, reading glasses — the cord should have a **breakaway clasp** that opens under load. A cord that does not is a hazard around furniture and in a fall. Four thousand reviews at 4.6.

WHY THESE — AND WHAT TO CHECK IF YOU BUY ANYWHERE ELSE

The winning design is the one that requires no decision. A **lanyard** or a **crossbody strap** means the phone goes on when you get dressed, the way glasses do. Pockets in housecoats and cardigans work equally well and cost nothing — sewing a deep pocket into the two things you wear most is a genuine solution, not a lesser one.

Two settings are worth having somebody set up for you, and they are free. **The emergency shortcut** — pressing the side button several times calls emergency services and messages your contacts with your location — exists on every modern phone. And **the medical card on the lock screen**, which shows your conditions,

medications and next of kin to a paramedic without unlocking anything. Both take ten minutes and neither costs a penny.

SEARCH TERMS

"cell phone lanyard crossbody" · "phone holder for around neck".

THE SWAP

HOPING SOMEBODY NOTICES → A CHECK-IN THAT HAPPENS BY

ITSELF

WHAT IT COSTS YOU NOW

The honest version of the opening of this chapter: on an ordinary Tuesday, the gap between something happening and somebody knowing is measured in hours.

THE SWAP

One of these three, and any one of them closes the gap.

A daily check-in call. These exist and most people have never heard of them. They are not one national program — they are hundreds of local ones, run by police departments, agencies on aging and charities, and they are usually free. A person or an automated system calls at a set time each day, and if you do not answer, they escalate to a contact you named. One state program, in Maryland, calls or messages residents over sixty daily and escalates if there is no reply. To find what exists where you are, call the national eldercare locator on **800-677-1116**, or ask your local agency on aging. Outside the United States the question to ask your council or municipality is: *"Is there a daily telephone check for older residents living alone?"*

A mutual arrangement. A neighbor at a similar stage, a friend across town: a text every morning, both ways. Both of you are covered and neither of you is being looked after, which for a lot of people is the difference between doing it and not.

A visible signal. The oldest system there is, and it still works: the blind that goes up in the morning, the porch light that goes off, the flowerpot that gets moved. One neighbor knows to look. It costs nothing and there is nothing to remember to charge.

Pick one. Any of the three beats the best alarm in the world, because they notice on a morning when you never got the chance to press anything.

The key, and who has one

If you have ever needed help urgently at home, the way that emergency actually ends is with somebody getting through your door.

Give a spare key to at least one person in your network — the official preparedness advice says the same, and adds that they should also know where your supplies are and how your equipment and medication work.

If there is no one nearby, there is a second answer: a lockbox mounted by the door, holding a key, opened by a code you give out over the phone. Many fire departments will tell you where they prefer it mounted, and some areas use a particular kind that only the fire service can open. That kind is a commercial product that municipalities have adopted, not a government program, so it is worth a call to your local fire department before buying anything — in some places they supply it and in others they will not open one.

What to buy.

Master Lock 5401D key safe **[\$\$]** — a four-dial combination box that bolts to the wall, from the company that has been making locks for a century. Nearly seven thousand reviews at 4.7.

Rudy Run outdoor key lockbox **[\$]** — larger inside, so it holds several keys and a fob rather than one, weather-resistant, and it mounts with the screws in the box. Six thousand reviews at 4.7, at about half the price.

Why these — and what to check if you buy anywhere else.

Buy one that **bolts to the wall**, not one that hangs on the door handle. A hanging one can be carried away and opened at leisure. Check that the dials or buttons are big enough for cold hands and for somebody reading a code off a phone in the dark.

Put it where a person arriving would look, not where it is hidden. The purpose is not to be secret. The purpose is to be opened by the right person quickly, and a key box no one can find helps no one.

Search terms: "key lock box wall mount heavy duty" · "combination key safe outdoor".

And the animal

If you live alone with a dog or a cat, they are a reason you get up in the morning and they are also a loose end in every plan above.

Two things, both free. **Arrange now** with a neighbor or a relative who will take them if you cannot — an actual conversation, not an assumption — and put that person's name on the same page as everything else. And make sure the **microchip details are current**, with a second contact who lives somewhere else, in case the same event that reaches you reaches your street.

If your pet is the reason you would refuse to go in an ambulance — and for a lot of people it quietly is — then this is not sentiment. It is the thing that makes the rest of the plan work.

What happens if you go to the hospital

The plan most people have is that somebody will sort it out. Here is the shorter version of sorting it out.

A bag, packed, in the closet. Two days of clothes, the glasses you actually use, the hearing aid batteries, a phone charger with a long cable, a copy of the medication list from the last chapter, and the name of whoever should be called. Hospitals are bright, cold and full of waiting, and the difference between having that bag and not having it is one entire bad afternoon for whoever loves you.

One person who knows the plan. Not everybody. One person, who has the folder, knows about the pet, and has a key.

And the discharge, which is the part that goes wrong. People are sent home from hospitals weaker than they went in, at short notice, often in the afternoon, to a house that has not changed. That is the moment for which every earlier chapter of this book was preparation — the second handrail, the grab bar, the shelf with the soup on it, the light in the hall. It is also the moment to say out loud, before you are discharged, that you live alone. Say it to the nurse and say it to the doctor. It changes what is arranged for you, and it is routinely assumed otherwise.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

If something happened at nine tomorrow morning, who would know, and when?

Is there a device in this house, bought for exactly this, that is not currently on you?

What is your rule — in advance, decided today — about when you press it?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

Nearly all falls among people living alone happen when they are alone, and most of those who could not get up owned an alarm and did not press it.

The device is not the problem. The decision is. Make it in advance, on a good day, and say it out loud to somebody.

A check-in that happens automatically beats the best alarm, because it notices on the morning you never got the chance to press anything.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, text one person and ask whether they would swap a good-morning message with you, every day, both ways.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

Living alone is the fact people point at, and they rarely say what they actually mean, which is: *if something happens, how long before we know?*

What you can say:
*"That's a fair worry
and I've answered it.
Margaret and I text
every morning, Ruth
has a key, and I wear
this — look."*

You have answered the real question instead of the stated one. And you have shown that the arrangement was yours, which is the whole difference between living alone and being left alone.

WHAT IT COSTS AND WHO HELPS PAY

Wherever you live

The contractor stands in your bathroom with a tape measure and gives you a number, and the number is roughly twice what you had in your head.

You say you will think about it. What you mean is that the bathroom is not getting done.

Something is wrong with that afternoon, and it is not the price. It was never a conversation about money — it was one price, from one person, for one version of the job, with no idea whether any part of it could be paid for by somebody else. And it ended the way those conversations always end.

Two things are true at the same time

Most of this book is cheap. Go back through it and add up the changes that cost less than a restaurant meal: the rocker switches, the lever handles, the night lights, the grab bars, the pull-out shelf, the stair treads, the lantern, the key box, the soup. That is the majority of the items in this guide, and between them they cover most of what makes a day cost less.

And a few things are not cheap. A walk-in shower. A ramp. A stairlift. A widened door. Those run from hundreds into thousands, and they are the ones people stall on for years.

This chapter is mostly about the second group, because the first group does not need a chapter. And the single most useful sentence in it is this: **for the expensive items, you are probably not supposed to be paying the whole thing yourself, and very few people will tell you so unprompted.**

The method, which works in any country

Every system I looked at — the United States, Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia — is built the same way under different names.

First the assessment, then the money.

The assessment is usually done by an **occupational therapist**, a professional whose job is to watch how you actually move through your house and write down what would make it work. In several countries this is free, and in most of them it is the step that unlocks everything else. An application without one goes to the bottom of the pile; an application with one is a document somebody has already agreed with.

It is also the intervention the falls research singled out, back in chapter seven — home changes reduce falls more reliably when an occupational therapist is the one deciding what to change.

So the method is three sentences long.

One. Find the body that handles this where you live — in the United States, your local agency on aging; in Britain and Ireland, your local council; in Canada, your province; in Australia, the national aged care service.

Two. Ask for an assessment, using their word for it. The phrase that opens the door is some version of: *"I want an occupational therapist assessment for home adaptations."*

Three. Ask the question people leave out: *"Which programs am I eligible for, and which of them do you administer?"* The person on the phone usually knows about several you have never heard of, and they are rarely volunteered.

That is the whole method. Everything below is names.

In the United States

There is no single program, and that is the thing to understand before you start making calls. There is a network, and the door into it is one phone number.

The Eldercare Locator: 800-677-1116, on weekdays. It connects you to your Area Agency on Aging — a local office, one of hundreds, and what each one offers **differs from place to place**. Some do home repairs and adaptations directly. Some fund them. Some only advise. There is no national list, so the only way to know what yours does is to call it.

Medicare does not pay for modifications, and knowing that saves you weeks. Ramps, grab bars and widened doors are classed as home improvements rather than treatment, so the basic program does not cover them. Two things it does cover are worth knowing: **durable medical equipment** when it is prescribed, and **occupational therapy** — which means the assessment, the thing that unlocks the rest, may be a covered benefit rather than a cost.

Medicare Advantage plans are a different matter. Some private plans do offer grab bars and safety modifications as a supplemental benefit for chronic conditions. It is not required and each plan decides for itself, so this is not a thing to assume — it is a thing to look up in your own plan's benefits, or to ask the plan directly, each autumn when the options change.

Medicaid, for lower incomes, is where the real money is for many people. In many states, though not all, the home-based programs cover what they call *environmental modifications* — ramps, grab bars, level-entry showers, widened doors. There is no national cap. Call your state Medicaid agency and ask for exactly that phrase: **"HCBS waiver, environmental modifications."** Saying it in those words gets you to the right desk.

If you or your spouse served, there are two separate routes and people often know about only one. **HISA** covers access to the home, an accessible bathroom, faucets, permanent ramps and fittings for equipment; it works through the local prosthetics service, with a prescription and a short form, and it has a lifetime cap that is adjusted from year to year. Separately, there are **large housing grants** for severe service-connected disabilities, which run into six figures. Ask about both by name, and ask what this year's figures are rather than trusting any printed number, including one in a book.

The tax deduction is the one people miss entirely. Medical home modifications can be deductible: a ramp, widening doorways, grab bars and handrails in a bathroom, lowering cabinets, moving outlets and switches, a porch lift, modifying alarms. The rule is that you deduct **the cost minus any increase in your home's value**, and your medical expenses for the year have to pass a percentage of your income before any of it counts. It is a conversation with whoever does your taxes rather than a form you fill in alone — but have it, because a five-thousand-dollar bathroom is a different decision if part of it comes back.

Two more, quickly. There is a **rural repair program** offering loans, and grants for homeowners over sixty-two on very low incomes, through its local office. And **Rebuilding Together**, a charity with local chapters, does safety and accessibility repairs free, with criteria that vary by chapter.

Outside the United States

The names change, the method does not. In all four countries below the route is the same: **the local authority or the public care service, after an occupational therapist's assessment.**

Britain. The **Disabled Facilities Grant**, through your local council's housing or social care department, covers widened doors, ramps, grab rails, level-access showers, a downstairs bedroom, adapted heating. The occupational therapist assessment comes first and is **free**. The

caps differ between England, Wales and Northern Ireland, so ask rather than trusting a number you read anywhere, this book included.

The most useful detail, and the least advertised: **small adaptations — grab rails, simple ramps — are usually provided free by the council directly**, without going through the big grant application at all. That is confirmed on the health service's own pages. If your list is short, you may not need a grant. You need a phone call.

Ireland. The **Housing Adaptation Grant for Disabled People**, through your local County Council, covers ramps and access, accessible showers, a downstairs toilet, a stairlift. On the official page as it stood in **December 2024**, the maximum grant was **€40,000**, and it could cover **up to 100%** of the approved cost for household incomes up to €37,500 a year, tapering to 30% for incomes between €62,501 and €75,000. The date comes with the figures deliberately — these move, so check the page before you plan around it.

Canada. There is **no single national program**, and it is worth knowing that before you go looking for one. The federal scheme is delivered directly only in Prince Edward Island and the Yukon; everywhere else, each province runs its own. Ontario's, for example, covers ramps, grab bars, level-entry showers, widened doors and stairlifts. Search for your own province's program by name. Separately, **Veterans Affairs Canada** contributes to modifications through its independence program.

Australia. The most unified of the four. Assistive technology and home modifications sit inside the national aged care system, and — the part that matters — the **assessment is part of the standard care assessment, and the funding is separate from your ordinary care budget**. You do not have to save it out of your services. Start with **My Aged Care**, online or on **1800 200 422**. There is a separate program for veterans, reached through a family doctor.

One honest gap. I could not find public, dedicated veterans' home-adaptation programs in Britain or Ireland — there are charities, but not a state scheme. And I could not confirm tax relief for medical adaptations in any of the four countries. It may exist. No official page said so, so it is not in this book as though it did.

Choosing who does the work

The money is one problem. The person holding the drill is the other, and this is where people get taken.

Three written quotes, for the same written scope. Write the job down yourself first — *remove the tub, install a level-entry shower, one grab bar at 33 inches on the side wall, one shower seat, relocate*

the switch — and give the same page to all three. Quotes for different jobs cannot be compared, and a vague scope is where a low number becomes a high invoice.

Ask specifically whether they have done accessibility work before, and ask to see two examples. A good general contractor may never have installed a grab bar into proper backing, and the difference is invisible until somebody puts their weight on it. In the United States there is a credential — a **Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist** — and while it is not a guarantee, asking about it tells you whether they know it exists.

Never pay in full up front. A deposit, then payment against work completed, is normal. Full payment in advance is not.

Check the license and the insurance yourself, with whoever issues them, rather than looking at a card. It takes ten minutes online in most places.

And get the occupational therapist's written recommendation into the contractor's hands. It removes the argument about what is needed and turns the meeting into a conversation about cost, which is the one you wanted.

If you rent

You are not out of this chapter, and renters are usually told that they are.

In the United States, a tenant with a disability **can request reasonable modifications** to the property, and a landlord generally must permit them — but the cost normally falls on the tenant rather than the landlord. Permission and payment are two different questions; people run them together and give up. Where the need is obvious, a landlord cannot demand extensive documentation to prove it.

Practically: ask in writing, offer to restore what can be restored, and start with everything in this book that leaves no mark — the lever handle that swaps back, the stick-on lights, the threshold ramp, the shower chair, the pull-out shelf, the tape on the stairs. That is most of the guide, and none of it needs anybody's permission.

For anything permanent, the grant programs above apply to tenants in several countries, sometimes with the landlord's written consent attached to the application. Ask the same question and mention that you rent, rather than assuming it is a no.

What things actually cost

Orders of magnitude rather than prices, because prices go out of date and labor varies far more than materials do.

Under fifty dollars, each. Almost everything in chapters three, four, six, eight and nine — switches, lever handles, night lights, pull-out shelves, stair treads, organizers, lanterns, a key box.

Fifty to three hundred. Grab bars fitted properly. A handrail for a flight of stairs. A shower chair and a handheld shower. A rolling cart. A threshold ramp. An outdoor rail. This band is where most of the real change in this book lives.

Hundreds to low thousands. A walk-in shower conversion. A modular ramp. Replacing a door and its frame.

Low thousands and up. A straight stairlift installed, and considerably more for a curved staircase. A full bathroom rebuild.

Two thoughts about the top band. **The cheap version of an expensive job is usually a bad idea** — a ramp built too steep is a ramp that goes unused, and it has cost you the money and the space and given you nothing. And **the order matters more than the total**: do the fifty-dollar band completely before you start on the thousands, because it is quite common to find afterward that the expensive job was not the one you needed.

PAUSE & REFLECT	What is the one expensive change you have been putting off, and how long has it been on the list?
Have you ever actually asked anybody whether help exists for it?	If the answer came back as half the cost, would you do it?
<i>There are no right answers. This is just for you.</i>	

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

The assessment comes before the money, in every country, and in several of them it is free.

The question that opens the door is:
"Which programs am I eligible for, and which of them do you administer?"

Most of this book costs less than a restaurant meal. Do all of that before you take a quote for anything that does not.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

This week, make one phone call and ask one question. In the United States, 800-677-1116. Elsewhere, your local council or aged care service.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

Money arrives in this conversation as a closing argument: *it would cost a fortune to make this place work.*

What you can say:
"I've had it assessed. Here's the list, here's what it costs, and here's what's covered. Now tell me what the other option costs."

The same arithmetic almost never gets run on the alternative. A year in most forms of senior living costs more than everything in this book put together, several times over, and it is a fair number to ask for out loud.

KEEPING IT, AND THE DAY THE ANSWER CHANGES

The season check, and re-deciding

Somewhere in a house very like yours there is a grab bar with three towels hanging on it. It was put in properly — somebody paid for it, somebody drilled into a stud, and for a while it did exactly what it was for. Then a towel went on it, because it was the right height and it was there. Then two more. And now, on the morning it is needed, there is a hand reaching for a bar that has a wet towel wrapped round it.

Nothing broke. That is the point of this chapter.

Everything in this book can quietly stop working

Go back over what you have changed. Every one of those items is now a thing that can fail — and almost none of them fails loudly.

A night light with a dead battery looks exactly like a night light. A grab bar that has worked slightly loose in its mounting feels solid until the day you need it to hold your whole weight. Anti-slip tape lifts at one corner and becomes something to catch a toe on. A rolling cart gets parked in a corner and filled with mail. A pull-out shelf stops being used because the thing at the front is heavy and now it lives on the counter. The emergency pendant is on the charger, and it has been on the charger since March.

This is the ordinary fate of every safety improvement ever made, in any building, and it is why the third word of the method is **KEEP**.

It is also the part every other guide leaves out. They end at the purchase — which is where their interest ends.

The season check

Four times a year, twenty minutes, one page. Tie it to the clocks changing and to the two solstices, or to the first of March, June, September and December — whatever you will actually remember.

Pull on everything that is supposed to hold you. Both hands, real weight, leaning. The grab bars, both handrails, the outdoor rail, the shower seat if it is fixed. Any movement at all, any rotation in the mount, means it gets tightened now rather than noted — noted is how a loose bar stays loose for a year. This takes ninety seconds and it is the most important thing on the page.

Press every button that is supposed to summon somebody. The pendant, the pager, the watch. Tell whoever it calls that you are testing, then test it. A device no one has ever pressed is a device no one knows works.

Change the batteries you cannot see. Smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, night lights, the key box, the alarm pendant, the flashlight in the drawer. Do not test them and decide they are fine — on the two alarms, change them on a schedule, because the failure is a slow decline rather than a sudden stop.

Walk the stairs and the path in bad light. Look for tape that has lifted, treads that slide, a bulb that has gone, the algae film coming back on the concrete. Outdoors, do this in October — before the first freeze, not after it.

Look at the four places things migrate to. The top shelf, which will have refilled itself. The back of the base cabinet. The bottom of the stairs, where a pile forms. And the hall floor by the door, where the boxes land.

Check the dates. The soup on the bad-day shelf. The batteries in the drawer. The water in the storage container. The medication list in the folder — is it still what you take?

And read the folder as a stranger would. Could somebody who does not live here find your medication list, your doctor, your contacts and your key, in under two minutes, without asking you? If not, that is this season's job.

PRINTABLE

PRINTABLE — The Season Check. One page, four columns, one for each quarter. Sign and date each column as you do it. It is in the back of this book, and the reason it has a date on it is that a check you cannot prove you did is a check you probably did not do.

The harder check, once a year

The season check is about the house. Once a year, check the other half.

Take the hesitation list from chapter two and do it again, from scratch, without looking at the old one. Walk the house slowly and write down where you hesitate, lean, detour, or put something off today.

Then compare the two pages.

Some items will have gone, and those are the changes that worked. Take a moment over that column — it is easy to stop noticing what stopped costing you.

Some will be new. That is not a failure and it is not a decline — it is the same thing that has happened every year of your life since you were thirty, and the only difference now is that you are writing it down. A new item on the list is information arriving on time, which is the entire argument of this book.

And some items will have moved. Something that was a small hesitation in March is a daily detour in November. Act on those first — a thing getting worse at a visible rate will keep doing so.

Then do what you did the first time. Sort by frequency, not by how alarming it sounds. Pick one. Alter it.

The seasons have their own list

Autumn, before the first freeze: outdoor rails, ice melt inside the door, the traction cleats on their hook, the path cleaned, the outside lights working, the furnace serviced. Do this in October. Everything on this list is three times harder to arrange in January — and some of it is impossible.

Winter: the bad-day shelf, the lanterns, the phone charger, the thirty days of medication. And the one that is not about equipment — winter is when people stop going out and the going-out habit is much harder to restart than to keep.

Spring: the outdoor surfaces, the algae, the slab that lifted over the winter, the gutters, the garden path. And the windows — spring is when you find out how much light you have been living without.

Summer: the heat plan. The fan working before you need it. Where the cool place is, and how you get to it. And whether there is anybody you have not seen since April.

The day the answer changes

Now the honest part, and it belongs at the end.

This book has been written on the assumption that you are staying — which is what most people choose, most of the time — and the whole guide is the case that staying is far more achievable than the alternative usually suggests.

But chapter one asked a question and did not close it, and it should not be closed permanently. *What do I need, and where can I get it?* is a question with a different answer at seventy-eight than it had at seventy-one, and the answer changing is not the plan failing.

There is a real moment to reopen it, and it is not the day somebody else suggests it. It is the day one of these becomes true.

When the list stops getting shorter. If you have done the annual check three years running and the new items are arriving faster than the alterations can catch them, the house is losing the race. That is information, and it is the cleanest signal there is.

When the fix is no longer hardware. A handrail buys time on the stairs; it does not buy a different floor plan. If what you need is a bathroom on this floor and there is no way to make one, no amount of the rest of this book changes that.

When the house is the reason you are alone. If the front door, the steps, the ice or the driving have shrunk your week to the size of these rooms, and the changes in chapter seven have not given it back, then the problem stopped being a house problem. It became a where-are-the-people problem, and houses do not solve those.

When somebody else is carrying it. If staying here works only because a specific person is doing a great deal, and you have not counted what it costs them, count it. Then have the conversation with them rather than about them.

And when the care needed exceeds what a building can provide. That is a staffing question, and it was never a hardware question.

If two or three of those are true at the same time, sit down and answer the three questions from chapter one again. What a regular day looks like and where it happens. What the fear underneath the stated fear actually is. What has already changed, and what the next change would cost.

You may well answer the same way you did the first time. Many people do, for years. The point is that you answer it, on a Tuesday, with a pen — rather than having it answered for you in a hospital corridor in one afternoon by whoever happens to be standing there.

My aunt, who has appeared in this book once already, did not spend two years making the wrong choice. She spent two years inside the wrong question. The advantage of asking it on a schedule is that you never find yourself inside it by accident.

What this was actually about

Go back to the beginning for a second.

You have probably read one of these before. Most of them are a list of things that might happen to you, arranged to make you buy something — and the reason so little gets done after reading one is that fear is a terrible project manager. It produces a bad week and no grab bars.

What this book asked you to do instead was smaller and stranger. Notice where your own day costs more than it should. Alter one thing. Keep it working.

You were not asked to do it because something terrible is coming — you were asked because the faucet that needs two hands is taking something from you every day, and you can have it back for thirty dollars and an afternoon.

Your body has changed. It has not failed. The house is the thing that has not kept up — and unlike your body, the house will do exactly what you tell it to.

**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

Which change from this book has already stopped working, and you knew it while you were reading this chapter?

What came off your hesitation list this year?

When will you do the next check, and what will remind you?

There are no right answers. This is just for you.

**WHAT TO
REMEMBER**

Nothing in this book fails loudly. It all fails quietly, and that is why the check has a date on it.

Four times a year for the house, once a year for the list. Twenty minutes and an hour.

The question from chapter one stays open on purpose. Answering it again is not the plan failing. It is the plan working.

**A GENTLE NEXT
STEP**

Today, put four dates in next year's calendar. Twenty minutes each. Write *season check* and nothing else.

**IF SOMEONE
SAYS YOU
SHOULD MOVE**

One last time, and this is the version to keep.

"I go through the house four times a year and I keep a list. Here it is. Ask me again next spring and I'll show you what changed."

That sentence ends the argument — not because it is clever, but because it is true and it is checkable. It replaces an opinion about you with a document. And the person who was worried gets what they actually wanted, which was never for you to move — it was to stop lying awake.

A CLOSING REFLECTION — WHAT THE HOUSE WAS FOR

Somewhere in this book you may have found yourself on your knees in your own bathroom with a tape measure, checking the floor of a shower you have used for twenty years to see whether a chair will fit in it. It feels a little ridiculous. It also feels, for a moment, like admitting something.

That moment stops a lot of people, and it stopped my mother for months. She had no quarrel with the idea of lever handles. She had a quarrel with what they would say about her.

Then she let me swap them, and afterward she said the sentence that sits near the front of this book:

"I didn't realize how much energy I was spending just trying to turn on a faucet or open a door. Now I can save that energy for things I actually want to do."

Read the second half again. The handles were the means. What she got back was the part of the day that came after them.

That is why the first sheet at the back of this book is a regular day, and why the house gets only one column on it. The column is there to serve the rest of the page — the coffee, the walk to the mailbox, whoever comes by on Thursdays, the chair you read in until the light goes. Every alteration in these chapters is measured against that page, in the end, and not against a list of hazards.

So in a few months, print a fresh copy and fill it in again. Some lines in the last column will have crossed over, from *the house makes it harder* to *the house helps*. Those are your results. They will not look like much on paper: a morning that runs a bit easier, an evening with something still left in it.

Some lines will not move. Most lists have one or two things no alteration reaches — the staircase that is the only way to the bathroom, the street that empties out every winter. This book has tried to be straight about those, and it is not going to pretend otherwise

on its way out. They are what chapter twelve is for. You are allowed to find them annoying.

Everything else can be taken back, one object and one afternoon at a time. Start with the thing you do most often.

Give it a month. There is a good chance you will forget you ever changed it. That is how a good alteration feels from the inside — like a jacket that has been taken in at the shoulders, which stops being something you think about and becomes the one you reach for.

APPENDIX — THE WORKING HALF OF THIS BOOK

Three sheets and a card to print, write on, and keep

These pages are meant to leave the book. Print them, write on them in pencil, fold them, and keep them somewhere you will see them. Each chapter told you when one of them was about to earn its keep. None of them is a test, and none of them has a finish line.

Print more than one copy of each. You will use the second sheet once per floor, and the third one for as many years as you live in the house.

A. THE REGULAR DAY

From chapter one. One page, one ordinary day — not the best one, a regular one. This is the first time you use NOTICE.

Write the day as it actually goes, from the moment you wake up to the moment you turn the light off. Then, in the last column, mark each line: does the house help this part of the day happen, or does the house make you work for it?

The hour	What I am doing	Who is there	The house helps / The house makes it harder

Which part of this day happened outside this house? Which part needed this house specifically?

B. THE HESITATION LIST

From chapter two. Print one page per floor. Do the walk at the end of the day, with a pencil, and fix nothing while you do it.

Floor: _____ Date of the walk: _____

Look for four things: where you **hesitate**, where you **lean**, where you **detour**, and what you **put off**. Write what happened, not what it means — *held the counter to reach the roasting pan*, not *kitchen unsafe*. Walk your own day, in the order you live it, and skip the rooms you never enter.

Room	What happened	Time of day	How many times (a day / a week)	This week · This month · Someday

The moments that are not a room. Give each one a line of its own, whichever floor it happens on.

Moment	What happened	How many times
The twenty seconds at night, bed to bathroom		
Coming home with your arms full		
Getting up — bed, chair, tub, car		
The bad week — a flu, a bad back, after a procedure		

Sorting it. Fill in the last column after the walk, not during it. Sort by how many times a day it happens, not by how bad it sounds:

- **This week** — happens often, costs little, needs no trade.
- **This month** — needs ordering, measuring, or an afternoon of somebody's time.
- **Someday, and not yet** — real money, a trade, or a decision you have not made.

Then take the top item from *this week*. Only that one.

C. THE SEASON CHECK

From chapter twelve. Four times a year, twenty minutes, one column each time. Sign and date the column when you finish it — a check you cannot prove you did is a check you probably did not do.

Year: _____

	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4
Pull on everything that holds you — grab bars, both handrails, the outdoor rail, a fixed shower seat. Real weight, both hands. Anything that moves gets tightened now.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Press every button that summons somebody — pendant, pager, watch. Tell whoever it calls that you are testing.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Change the batteries you cannot see — smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, night lights, the key box, the pendant, the flashlight in the drawer.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Walk the stairs and the path in bad light — lifted tape, sliding treads, a dead bulb, the film coming back on the concrete.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Look at the four places things migrate to — the top shelf, the back of the base cabinet, the bottom of the stairs, the floor by the door.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Check the dates — the bad-day shelf, the spare batteries, the stored water, the medication list in the folder.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Read the folder as a stranger would — medication list, doctor, contacts, key. Findable in two minutes, without asking you?	☐	☐	☐	☐
What I fixed or changed this time				
Date				
Signed				

Once a year, the harder check. Do the Hesitation List again, from a fresh sheet, without looking at the old one. Then put the two side by side: what has gone, what is new, what has moved. Act on the ones that moved first.

Year's walk done on: _____

The seasons have their own list. Autumn, before the first freeze: rails, ice melt inside the door, the cleats on their hook, the outside lights, the furnace. Winter: the bad-day shelf and the habit of going out. Spring: the outdoor surfaces and the windows. Summer: the heat plan, and anybody you have not seen since April.

D. THE FITTING — THE POCKET CARD

The whole method, on one card. Cut it out, fold it along the middle line, and keep it in your wallet or on the refrigerator door.

✂ - - - - -

THE FITTING
A We Get Better With Age reminder

NOTICE
Where you hesitate, lean, detour,
or put something off. Not where it is
dangerous – where your day costs
more than it should.

ALTER
The one change that gives it back.
One object, one afternoon.
An alteration, not a renovation.

KEEP
What makes it last. Who installs it,
what you check, when you look again.

- - - - - fold here - - - - -

WHEN YOU SORT THE LIST

Sort by how often it happens,
not by how bad it sounds.

This week – often, cheap, no trade
This month – order it, measure it,
 or borrow an afternoon
Someday – money, a trade,
 or a decision not yet made

Take the top one from this week.
Only that one.

Your body has changed.
It has not failed.
Notice. Alter. Keep.

✂ - - - - -

STAY CONNECTED — THE WE GET BETTER WITH AGE COMMUNITY

If this guide gave you something useful, it's just a small taste of what lands in your inbox every week at blog.wegetbetterwithage.com.

We're a warm, welcoming community built around one simple belief: the years after sixty aren't about slowing down — they're about getting stronger, steadier, and more alive, one good day at a time.

Inside, you'll find science-based wellness articles, real stories from people living it, and small, doable steps that fit into the life you already have — no overwhelm, no jargon.

Free subscribers get two articles every week — one every Tuesday, one every Friday — to keep you informed, inspired, and gently moving forward.

Paid members get everything free members do — plus more. Every month we take one theme that really matters — like gratitude or aging in place — and explore it in depth with a Sunday Deep-Dive, turning the science into simple steps you can actually live by. You'll also get the keys to our **full archive of 200+ articles**, so whenever a question comes up — a restless night, a worry about the stairs, a hard conversation ahead — there's already a thoughtful, science-based piece waiting for you.

SUBSCRIBE HERE →

And this isn't the only guide we've made for you. You'll find the whole collection — every We Get Better With Age guide, in one place — at guides.wegetbetterwithage.com.

Come join us. The best chapters are still ahead — and they're better shared.

REFERENCES — WHERE THE FACTS COME FROM

The research findings, measurements and program details in this guide come from the sources below: government agencies, the federal accessibility standard, and peer-reviewed studies. They are listed here so you can read further, check a figure for yourself, or take a page to a contractor, a doctor or a benefits office.

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This guide is educational and reflects the sources above as they stood in September 2026. Grant amounts, eligibility rules and program names change, often every year — before you apply for anything, check the current figures with the office that runs it. Nothing here is a substitute for advice from your own doctor, occupational therapist or a licensed professional.

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