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Home Sweet Home: Making Your House Work for the Decades Ahead

Ask most Boomers where they want to be living ten or twenty years from now, and the answer is the same: right here, in my own home. That's a wonderful goal, and it's achievable. But a house designed for a thirty-five-year-old with a laundry basket and a full set of knees doesn't always age gracefully with us. A little planning now keeps you independent for the long haul.

"The best time to prepare your home is before you need the changes."

Start with Safety

Falls are one of the biggest threats to independent living, and most happen at home. The fixes are often simple and inexpensive:

- Remove or secure throw rugs and clear cords from walkways.
- Brighten the lighting, especially on stairs, in hallways, and between the bedroom and bathroom.
- Add night lights along the path you walk after dark.
- Install sturdy handrails on both sides of the stairs.

Upgrades Worth Considering

- **Grab bars** in the shower and beside the toilet, properly anchored into studs.
- **Lever door handles** and faucets, which are easier on arthritic hands than round knobs.
- **A step-free entrance**, even if it's a gently sloped ramp.

- **A main-floor bedroom and bathroom**, or at least the option to create them.

Get Expert Eyes on It

An occupational therapist can walk through your home and spot hazards you've stopped noticing. Contractors with the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation focus on exactly these projects. Your local Area Agency on Aging can also point you to programs, and sometimes to financial help, for home modifications.

Think Beyond the Building

Staying home well also means thinking about transportation, nearby friends, grocery access, and who will check in on you. A safe house in a lonely location is only half a plan.

Join the Conversation

Have you already made changes to help your home age with you? What worked, and what do you wish you'd done sooner? Scroll down to the Comments section below and add to the conversation. Your experience could save a fellow reader a lot of trial and error.