

# TIPS For Living Life To Its Fullest

## Remaining in Your Home as You Age

Are you planning to remain in your own home as you grow older? Are you finding it more difficult to manage some daily tasks in your home? Do you or your family and friends have safety concerns about you living alone?

As abilities diminish as part of the normal aging process, assistance or changes might be needed to maintain your independence and age safely at home. An occupational therapist will work with you to ensure that recommendations to increase independence and safety are specific to your wants and needs, skills, environment, budget, and other criteria. The following tips come from occupational therapy practitioners who work with older adults to help them stay in their homes.

<b>I want to:</b>	<b>What you can do:</b>	<b>An occupational therapist will:</b>
Be safe and independent in my home.	Think honestly about those things your are having trouble with, and ask for assistance when possible. You may be able to do a "swap" with neighbors (e.g., offer to sign for packages if they work during the day in exchange for help changing light bulbs in hard-to-reach places).  Hire professionals for regular cleaning and lawn care, arrange for Meals on Wheels, etc.	Provide an evaluation in your home to assess your skills, abilities, and safety, and make recommendations that meet your needs and reassure your family members.

<b>I want to:</b>	<b>What you can do:</b>	<b>An occupational therapist will:</b>
<p>Get to the grocery store, doctor's appointments, and social events.</p>	<p>If you're concerned about your driving skills, consider asking a friend or neighbor to provide a ride whenever possible (offering gas money or a service in return can make this easier). If you haven't taken public transportation in the past, you may be surprised at the number of options available. Many communities offer a free bus or van to shopping centers or even medical appointments.</p> <p>If you are still driving, attend a CarFit event in your community to be sure your vehicle's adjustments are best for you (<a href="http://www.car-fit.org">www.car-fit.org</a>).</p> <p>Avoid driving during rush hour, at night, on busy roads, or in inclement weather.</p>	<p>Consider all the options to help you get around in the community. These may include conducting a driving evaluation (with the goal of addressing problem areas so you can drive safely), providing non-driving options for you to get around the community, helping you become comfortable with the public transportation system, etc.</p>
<p>Make changes that will help me live independently and safely.</p>	<p>Remove unnecessary throw rugs to reduce the risk of falling; decrease clutter; repair furniture that isn't sturdy; reduce electrical cords, keep them away from walking paths, and be sure all outlets are grounded; and purchase "universal design" products to improve their ease of use.</p> <p>Share your schedule with friends and neighbors, and/or set up a regular social event so others will be alerted if something has happened to you.</p>	<p>Watch you as you do the things you want and need to do, and recommend changes to increase safety, ease, and ability now and in the future. Suggestions may include adding adaptive equipment such as grab bars or stair lifts, lowering counter heights, adding railings, replacing door knobs with lever style handles, widening doorways, etc.</p>

I want to:	What you can do:	An occupational therapist will:
Modify my home on a limited budget.	Explore community-based groups, such as Rebuilding Together, whose volunteers help repair and modify homes for those who can't afford to do so.	Suggest low-cost equipment and other changes, such as increasing wattage for better lighting, using a reacher to avoid bending over or standing on a stool, using the microwave and not the stove to reduce fire hazards, etc. An occupational therapist will also provide training on adaptive equipment to be sure the recommendations are right for you and will be used.

### Need More Information?

If you are interested in having an occupational therapist help you stay in your home, ask your physician for a referral. You can also contact an occupational therapist in private practice who specializes in home modifications (these individuals may have CAPS or SCEM among their credentials).

If you have had a recent medical change and qualify for home health services, a home health agency will be able to provide an occupational therapist. Some Area Agencies on Aging also employ occupational therapists to address aging in one's home.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations). It is covered by private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, workers' compensation, vocational programs, behavioral health programs, early intervention, and school programs. Services also may be covered through Social Security, state mental health agencies or those serving individuals with intellectual impairment, health and human services agencies, private foundations, and grants. Many providers accept private payments.

Copyright © 2011 by the American Occupational Therapy Association. This material may be copied and distributed for personal or educational uses without written consent. For all other uses, contact [copyright@aota.org](mailto:copyright@aota.org).