



Aging well

There's no place like home

Most people want to stay in their own homes as they grow older, something known as "aging in place." If that's your goal, some planning, research into available resources, and a few modifications to your home may make it possible for you to stay healthy, safe, and comfortable without making a move.

Talk to your doctor. "If you have any ongoing health issues, ask your doctor how your condition might progress or change in the coming months and years," says Bob Riggs, MD,

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a Kaiser Permanente family physician in Spokane. "Also ask about your medications. Your body changes as you age, and medications that worked well for you in the past may have new side effects, such as making you dizzy and more likely to fall."

Have an honest conversation with your family. Tell family members that your goal is to stay in your home as you age, and that you might need help with transportation, running errands, fixing meals, and home maintenance. Find out if they are willing to help out.

Safety check your home. "Preventing falls that can cause serious injuries and limit your independence is key to successfully aging in place,"

says Dr. Riggs. Go through your home and look for tripping and slipping hazards. Pay special attention to stairs and bathrooms, two of the more hazardous areas in your home. Make sure lighting is adequate everywhere. For more tips, see page 22.

Explore resources in your community. Many communities offer services to support older adults' health and independence at home, including help with household chores, home health care, and transportation. Local senior centers may provide meals and activities.

To find out about services in your area, call the Kaiser Permanente Resource Line at **1-800-992-2279** or the Eldercare Locator, **1-800-677-1116** (eldercare.acl.gov).

Consider costs. Think about expenses you may have, including hiring help. Before arranging any service or assistance, know what it costs. Check your Medicare Advantage plan and any other insurance you may have to see if a service is a covered expense. If it's not, can you comfortably pay for it without coverage?

Choose your help carefully. "Whether you need help paying bills, cooking or cleaning, or in-home medical care, surrounding yourself with people you trust may be one of the most important aspects of successfully aging in place," says Dr. Riggs. "Trust your gut and if you ever feel uneasy or downright afraid, contact your service provider if there is one, or a friend or family member." ■

Staying at home works for Spokane couple

Kaiser Permanente members Judy Kotar, 79, and her husband, Tom Berry, 74, have found a variety of ways to stay safe and healthy in their Spokane-area home.

"I use a walker and a 4-pronged cane to help with my balance," says Kotar. "Tom is more mobile than I am, so he gets the basement for his workshop and the second level for relaxing. I keep everything I need on the main floor, and there's a gate at the top of the stairs down to the basement so I don't topple down accidentally."

The couple also has a handrail going down the back steps outside, and a handrail and ramp with a well-attached rubberized carpet runner to help Kotar get from the house to the garage.

Making use of community resources, simplifying meal preparation, and eating well also help the couple stay healthy at home. Five days a week they go to the community center for lunch provided by Meals on Wheels. Tom is the cook in the family, and he often makes healthy meals in a slow cooker, which yields plenty of leftovers. He also likes to bake with fruit, and favorites include banana bread and apple crisp.

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Judy Kotar and her husband, Tom Berry, have made some changes, like adding handrails, to make their home safer.

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As for their medications, they order prescription refills online and receive them via Kaiser Permanente's mail-order pharmacy. "We can get a 3-month supply at one time, and I use a 7-day pill box to keep track of what I'm taking," says Kotar. ■

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Preventing falls in your home



Stairs

Install handrails on both sides of stairs and carpet or traction treads on the steps.



Bathrooms

Add grab bars in bathtubs and showers and around toilets. Use thin, nonslip bath mats.



Area rugs and doormats

Get rid of these or put nonslip material underneath them.



Chairs

Use chairs that have arms to make it easy to sit and stand.



Step stools and ladders

Stay off them. Keep items you use frequently within easy reach.



Lighting

Keep inside and outside walkways well-lit and clear of clutter, especially the path to the bathroom at night.



Shoes

Always wear slippers or shoes with nonslip soles.



Supportive devices

Use a walker or cane if needed for added stability.



Vision

Get regular eye exams and keep prescription eyeglasses up to date.