

# Independent Living Assistance

## Bathroom safety



Maintaining safety in the bathroom is very important because the combination of slippery floors and hard surfaces can sometimes create a hazardous environment. The following are some simple changes that may help keep you safe in your bathroom.

### For the shower

- Shower stools or chairs (with or without lockable castors) allow a person to sit down whilst showering, preventing fatigue and reducing the risk of falls. Arm rests and height-adjustable legs provide additional support when transferring.
- Permanent shower benches can be fixed to the wall and folded back out of the way when not needed.
- Grab rails provide a safe means of support for transferring in/out and stabilise you while using the shower. It is important to consider the location of rails and to ensure that they are installed securely and with the appropriate fasteners. Refer to Australian Standard 1428.1 - Design for Access and Mobility (2021) for information, if required. A variety of slip resistant rails are available.
- Slip-resistant flooring, mats or tiles placed on the shower floor help to prevent falls. It is important to ensure that all loose corners on mats are secured to prevent tripping.
- A hand-held shower hose can be used to direct water where required while sitting or standing. Different styles include permanent options that replace the existing showerhead or temporary options that fit onto existing fittings with push-on cups or rubber tightened with metal bands.
- A permanent hand-held shower hose may be mounted on a secure grab rail or bracket to allow different height adjustments.
- It is important to check the compatibility of the hand-held shower hose with the type of hot water system because certain situations

(such as a toilet flushing) may cause sudden and extreme fluctuations in water temperature. Not all gravity-fed hot water systems are compatible with all hand-held showerheads.

- Consider the type of handset for a hand-held shower hose - think about the weight and type of grip. Also ensure the placement is within easy reach. The shower hose should be long enough to use while seated. It is important to consider the range of water spray to ensure it is not directed towards power outlets.
- Other considerations include a shower platform to eliminate the step into the shower and the use of a shower curtain rather than a shower screen to improve access.
- A long-handled back sponge or toe washer, soap on a rope, or soap in a 'wash mitten' can also help eliminate unnecessary bending and potential fall hazards. Consider installing wall mounted dispensers.

### For the bath

- Some homes have a combined shower over the bath, which can increase the risk of falls. Using a bath board across the top of the bath allows the user to have a seated shower over the bath and helps when getting in and out.
- If a bath board does not fit, a height adjustable bath transfer bench that sits on freestanding legs may be an option.
- An electric bath hoist can make it easier to lower a person into and out of the bath. Some hoists come with a reclining backrest.
- Fixed grab rails provide support when transferring to and from the bath.
- Slip resistant mats, liquid applications and adhesive strips can be applied to the bath surface to reduce the risk of slipping.

### Hot water and scalding

Thermostatic mixers have a built-in stabiliser so water cannot run too hot or too cold.

Computerised models have a control panel to program temperature and flow rates.

Thermostatic mixers have a single control for adjusting the temperature and/or the volume of water passing through units. They can be used to control one outlet or the entire house.

If scalding is a concern, adjusting the hot water system at the thermostat may be an option. On some hot water systems, the maximum water temperature can be adjusted.

Anti-scald devices can also be fitted to the hot water pipes. These devices have a valve that reacts to water temperature at a certain level. If the valve detects a rise in temperature, it automatically reduces water flow.

### Taps

Turning taps on and off may be difficult for several reasons, including painful hands, weak grasp, taps turned off too tightly, old washers or the style of tap may simply be too difficult to grip. Options include:

- Quarter turn taps allow the tap to be turned on and off within 90 degrees, decreasing the amount of hand twisting required.
- A lever-style handle on a tap is often easier to manage and can sometimes be extended to enable use with the side of the hand or elbow, reducing the pressure placed on the small joints of the hand
- A 'tap turner' is a device that fits over the existing tap head creating a lever tap. These are available in a large range of options to suit various tap heads. It is important to know exactly which tap head you have before looking into this option. Some tap turners are adjustable to fit several different heads. In some cases, a piece of slip resistant material may be enough to provide extra grip.
- Replacing or installing new taps is not always practical. Consider modifying existing taps. The first step may be to replace existing

rubber washers with an 'o' ring or hydro seal. Less force is then required to turn the tap on and off.

- More expensive options include foot controlled taps or infra-red/electronic sensor taps that are sensitive to movement and allow water to flow when hands are placed in the basin.

### For the toilet

- Built up toilet seats can be attached to the top of the toilet bowl to raise the height of the seat
- Height adjustable frames with handrails can be put around the toilet to help support people sitting and rising from the toilet. The frames are available with or without an attached toilet seat, commode pan or splash guard.
- Grab rails can be attached to the walls near the toilet to help people to sit and rise from the toilet.
- Bidets can be retrofitted to toilets and can be built up in height. This is especially good for those with shoulder injuries.

### Slip-resistant flooring

- Slip resistant mats, liquid applications and adhesive strips can help prevent falls. Slip-resistant tiles are another option.
- It is important to consider the ease of application, cleaning and maintenance, the finished appearance, durability and whether some treatments may be too abrasive for bare feet or create a tripping hazard.

### Designing new bathrooms

- It is important to take the style of taps into consideration. Consider the ability of all users to reach and use the taps effectively and safely (for example a person in a wheelchair must be able to reach and use taps from a seated position).
- Ensure that there is adequate clearance between tap handles (especially if using a

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- lever handle) and nearby walls, bench tops, basins or other plumbing fixtures.
- Flooring can be made safer by installing slip resistant tiles.
- Avoid steps or a shower over the bath in favour of a stepless shower alcove.
- Consider installing permanent shower benches, grab rails, hoists and toilet seat raisers.
- Thermostatic mixers and other methods to prevent scalding are recommended.

### Other safety ideas for the bathroom

- Replace towel rails with fixed grab rails for extra support.
- Use a height adjustable bathroom chair/stool to sit on while drying and dressing after a shower.
- Install childproof locks for bathroom cabinets to avoid accidental poisoning.
- Use scald warning devices that change colour when the water goes above a specified temperature.
- Use plastic inflatable covers over bathtub taps in order to protect users from head injury.

### Further information and support

An occupational therapist can conduct a bathroom safety assessment that can help you make decisions about setting up the bathroom environment.

Through **My Aged Care** it is possible for older people to access Australian Government-subsidised services including a home assessment by an occupational therapist and home modifications to improve safety and help prevent falls. To check eligibility and apply for an assessment, call 1800 200 422 or visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au/](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au/).

People under the age of 65 with a permanent disability who are **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** participants may be

eligible for an occupational therapist assessment. If they have Assistive Technology or Consumables funding approval, equipment that is deemed necessary may also be supplied.

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help with sourcing useful resources and locating equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776 or email [information@catalystfoundation.com.au](mailto:information@catalystfoundation.com.au).

*The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.*

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