

Parkinson's-friendly homes

Creating a Parkinson's-friendly environment requires thoughtful modifications that focus on enhancing the comfort, safety, and independence of those living with Parkinson's.

Ensuring your home is a safe and comfortable space is essential for maintaining your quality of life as Parkinson's progresses.

Where do I start?

Begin by consulting with an Occupational Therapist (OT) who can recommend adjustments to significantly enhance your safety and independence.

Technology has come a long way and there are many automated systems (lights, blinds, heating/cooling) that make your life easier. Remember, necessary home modifications may be funded through your NDIS or MAC plans.

Reducing falls in the house

Some easy safety tips include removing tripping hazards by decluttering floors and pathways to reduce the risk of falls.

You can also secure rugs to the floor or remove them. Choose non-slip mats or tiles to prevent slips and falls in the bathroom.

Make sure all furniture is arranged to create open pathways. Ensure shelves and stands are stable and won't tip over.

Get sturdy furniture, especially a suitable bed and elevated chair, that is at an appropriate height to reduce the risk of falls and makes getting up easier.

Keeping frequently used areas well-lit reduces the risk of accidents. Consider automatic night lights for added safety, especially for trips to the bathroom.

Install grab rails or handles where needed to help with getting up off the toilet, in the shower, getting in and out of bed. Install accessible showers to minimise tripping risks.

Use a claw grabber to help with reaching things up high and on the ground to minimise overbalancing.

In the kitchen

There are many helpful kitchen items to make food preparation, cooking and eating easier. Some top tips include:

- Kettle tippers can help prevent spills and burns by holding and pivoting your kettle on a frame.
- Using extra-long tongs and extra-long oven mitts to protect yourself from potential burns.
- Install handles instead of knobs on drawers, and handles or mixer tap sink faucets.
- Use pull-out shelves and lazy susans to reduce the risk of falls or strain from overreaching.
- Make meal preparation easier by doing it during 'on' times.
- Lower or install adjustable height countertops.
- Non-slip 'Dycem mats' can also anchor your items onto any surface so they don't move, e.g. when stirring something in a bowl.
- Adaptive cutting boards and rocker knives also help during food prep.

- Jar and bottle openers can remove or close lids more easily.
- Use of adaptive utensils, including forks, knives, and spoons can help with eating with a tremor. Some can swivel to help avoid spills while others are weighted or have bigger grips.
- Other products have an attached handle or strap to stabilise the hand at mealtimes and allow for a better grip. These utensils can help a person maintain independence in their life.
- Specially designed bowls and cups are also available with handles, lids, and higher sides to aid scooping and prevent spills.

In the bathroom

Make sitting down and standing up easier with elevated toilet seats and grab bars.

Handheld shower heads improve bathing accessibility with better control and reach.

A shower stool or chair can conserve your energy and reduce chance of slips or falls while showering.

An electric toothbrush and water flosser can help with dental care.

In the bedroom

A good night's sleep is so important for people living with Parkinson's. Maximising your comfort and safety in the bedroom is paramount to achieve this.

Arrange frequently used items for easy access, minimising the need for moving around the room. Place a drink bottle and morning dose of medication on the bedside table before bed.

Satin sheets or pyjamas and a blanket cradle can help with turning in bed. A touch lamp is easily turned off and on.

Outside the home

Install sensor lights and ensure even footing on paths to enhance safety. Address trip hazards and consider ramps for accessibility.

If gutters need to be cleaned or there is high work or power tools to be used think about asking for help.

Generally, tremor, changes in balance and coordination combined with the slowness symptoms people with Parkinson's experience may impact safe use of power tools, ladders, and step stools.

If you are impacted seek support from your local council, disability services, NDIS, or My Aged Care (MAC).

General safety considerations

If you have a loss of or diminished sense of smell, consider getting a natural gas detector and make sure there are smoke alarms in every room.

Have a communication system to allow you to hear the person with Parkinson's in other rooms of the house.

If your home has stairs, make sure it has sturdy handrails. When stairs are no longer an option, look at stairlifts, internal lifts, and ramp options.

Light switches should be easy to reach and near each doorway or hallway. Consider installing sensor or blue-toothed lights in high traffic areas.

Empower yourself with thinking about these home modifications early, making your environment supportive and secure throughout the stages of Parkinson's.

Your wellbeing should be at the heart of every adjustment, ensuring you maintain the independence you deserve.

Infosheet kindly reviewed by Occupational Therapy Australia.

To find an OT go to: www.otaus.com.au

