

Healthy Aging: A handyman might be the key to aging in your own home

Sunday

Posted Jan 22, 2017 at 12:01 AM

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If someone told you the home you live in and want to remain in until the end of your days could be made measurably safer, literally almost ensuring your aging-in-place preferences could be realized, and at an overall cost of less than \$500 (perhaps significantly less), you would probably want to know more.

Here's the deal. A study completed at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing referred to as "CAPABLE" (Community Aging in Place - Advancing Better Living for Elders), focused on ways to support older adults in living more comfortably (and safely) in their homes. It started with a group of seniors who were given an in-home assessment of fall-risk potential and an evaluation of personal independence in activities of daily living (bathing, toileting, dressing, etc.).

In this study, an occupational therapist did a comprehensive evaluation of problem areas in the homes and offered what were sometimes very simple recommendations. Then a licensed, bonded, vetted handyman (yes, it is a "handyman" we are talking about here!) made the suggested home modifications. Things such as the installation of hand rails or grab bars, secure placement of a toilet riser or the addition of an emergency light in the bathroom (or the hall going toward the bathroom). Each situation is different. Maybe it's a carbon monoxide detector you need. Maybe it's a lighted house number at your front door so if emergency vehicles have to be called, they can find you more easily.

The results included an improved ability for independence and a greater capacity to age in place. Simple changes can make measurable impact.

A New England Burden of Disease (BODE) report stated that "home safety assessment and modification" appears to be "a very cost-effective health sector intervention." And even more cost-effective was targeting this intervention to older people with previous injurious falls. The cost-benefit analysis found a "33 percent reduction in spending to treat fall injuries over three years, and potentially a six-fold savings in 'social costs' related to such injuries." In that study the average cost per home modification was \$448.