

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

Sunday

Posted Jan 22, 2017 at 12:01 AM

Share

---

By Sharon Johnson for the Mail Tribune

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.