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How to Support Independent Living

If you're looking for ways to help a family member or loved one remain independent, even small repairs and modifications can make the home safer and easier to navigate. Consider how these simple changes can make a large difference when it comes to home safety:

- Set the thermostat of the water heater at 120 degrees F or lower to prevent accidental scalding.
- As a reminder to keep the smoke alarm working, change the batteries on daylight saving's time.
- Locate appliances close to outlets, making sure cords run along walls and away from sinks or stoves.
- Install handrails and non-slip mats in the bathroom and shower.
- Install a ramp to allow easier access to the home.

In addition, there may be services available from the government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations that can help your loved one maintain independence.

- Services like "Meals on Wheels" deliver hot meals to homebound people.
- Local community or senior centers offer companionship, including classes, recreational opportunities, travel, volunteer opportunities, and meals.
- Community groups or even the local police may sponsor friendly visitor programs, where volunteers make scheduled visits to isolated seniors.
- There also are telephone reassurance programs, where volunteers call people to chat or check on their well-being.
- So-called "gatekeeper programs" may be offered through public utilities and the Postal Service. Workers who regularly visit the home are trained to look for changes in your loved one's condition.

The Area Agency on Aging can provide the names of other local organizations that offer legal, financial, health-care, and other services that help older adults maintain their independence.

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