

Your HomeFit "To Do" Lists

Some HomeFit improvements are so simple they can take seconds to complete — and you really can do them yourself. Other projects require both skill and time.

The Do-It-Yourself List

You'll likely be able to handle all or some of the following tasks. If in doubt about your abilities, seek the help of a family member, friend or skilled professional.

- Install night-lights in the bathroom and in the hallways that are used after dark
- Apply nonslip adhesive strips to uncarpeted stair treads
- Remove all scatter rugs or use double-sided tape to secure them to the floor
- Install a rubber-suction bathmat or anti-slip floor strips or decals in the tub and shower
- Place a lightweight, easy-to-use ABC-rated fire extinguisher in an easily accessible location in the kitchen
- Arrange furniture to allow for easy passage
- Check the carpeting on stairs to be sure it's firmly attached
- Set the hot water heater to 120°F or below to reduce energy costs and prevent scalding
- Install address numbers that can be easily seen from the street
- Install lever-style door handles, which are easier to use than doorknobs
- Keep a phone near your bed and in the rooms you spend a lot of time. (If you use a corded phone, take care to avoid tripping over the cord.)
- Install a hand-held, adjustable-height showerhead for easier bathing
- Check the wattage ratings on your lamps and light fixtures, and install the brightest bulbs allowed
- Place electrical and phone cords along a wall where they won't be a tripping hazard
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on all levels of the house, especially in or near the bedrooms
- Replace knobs on cabinets and drawers with easier-to-grip D-shaped handles
- Add a work surface you can sit at by placing a table where needed, or by removing some cabinet doors and shelving beneath a countertop
- Check outdoor walkways for loose bricks or pavers, and keep the paths clear of debris, including slippery wet leaves, moss or mold
- Trim overgrown shrubbery to provide a clear view from doors and windows
- Create an emergency exit plan for getting yourself and others out of the home

The *Don't-Do-It Yourself* List

For certain improvements you may need to hire a skilled contractor or seek help from a handy friend or relative. Some examples:

- Replace traditional light switches with easier-to-use rocker-style light switches
- Install a handrail on both sides of any staircase
- Mount grab bars next to the toilet and bathtub and in the shower
- Install swing-away or swing-clear hinges on all doors to add two inches of width for easier access
- Install a security peephole on exterior doors
- Install deadbolts and other protective hardware on exterior doors
- Install photosensitive porch or entryway lighting that will turn on at dusk and off at dawn
- Install outdoor floodlights with motion sensors
- Replace or remove any worn, torn or loose carpeting
- Install adjustable, pull-down shelving to facilitate safe access to upper cabinets
- Install a Lazy Susan in corner cabinets and pull-out cabinetry or shelving under counters
- Insulate the attic for better heating and cooling energy efficiency

When Hiring a Home Improvement Contractor

1. Make a list of what you need done

Write down *exactly* what you want the contractor to do.

2. Seek recommendations from family and friends

Beware the stranger who shows up at your home unannounced and says something like, "I'm on a job in the area already so I can give you a good price." This is rarely a smart choice and could be a scam. (Visit aarp.org/fraudwatch for more about protecting yourself from scammers.)

3. Check the recommendations

The Better Business Bureau (visit bbb.org) can tell you if complaints have been filed against a contractor or company. Also, although having a state license doesn't guarantee reliability, it's a minimum qualification a contractor should have.

4. Ask for estimates

Meet with at least three contractors. Estimates should detail the materials to be used, the labor charges, the start and end dates and the total cost. Ask for proof that the contractor is licensed, bonded and covered by workers' compensation and liability insurance. Check references from past clients.

5. Get everything in writing

Don't approve any plans you don't understand. Never sign a contract with any blanks, and do keep a copy of everything you sign. Take your time to make a decision and, remember, genuinely good deals will still be there tomorrow.

6. Don't pay the final bill until all the work is complete

Be sure all required building authorities have inspected the work, and get a written statement that the contractor has paid all of the subcontractors and suppliers.