

Senior-Friendly Kitchen Safety Checklist: 30 Checks for Aging Parents

A practical room-by-room review for older adults, caregivers, and families

HOW TO USE IT

Walk through the kitchen together. Mark each check as complete, needs attention, or not applicable. Fix quick hazards first and assign repairs that need a qualified professional.

Clear Paths and Prevent Falls

1. Remove loose rugs and floor clutter

Clear throw rugs, bags, boxes, pet items, and other trip hazards from kitchen routes. If a mat is necessary, use a low-profile mat with a secure nonslip backing and check that its edges lie flat.

2. Route cords away from walking areas

Keep appliance and extension cords out of traffic paths. Never run cords under rugs or where feet, walkers, or chair legs can damage them.

3. Clean spills immediately

Keep paper towels or an absorbent cloth within easy reach. Clean water, oil, and dropped food as soon as they appear, and use a visible sign or barrier until the floor is dry.

4. Keep the main work triangle unobstructed

Walk the route between the refrigerator, sink, stove, and dining area. Move stools, trash cans, and small furniture that narrow the path or require awkward turns.

5. Provide a stable place to sit

Use a sturdy chair or perching stool for food preparation if standing causes fatigue or unsteadiness. It should not roll, wobble, or block the exit.

Improve Lighting, Reach, and Everyday Access

6. Brighten work surfaces and routes

Make sure the entrance, sink, counters, stove, and floor are evenly lit. Replace failed bulbs promptly and reduce glare that makes wet spots or edges harder to see.

7. Make switches easy to find

Place switches near entrances and use high-contrast labels or illuminated switches where helpful. Add motion-activated lighting for nighttime trips, but keep a reliable manual switch.

8. Store daily items between waist and shoulder height

Move frequently used dishes, pans, and ingredients out of very high or low cabinets. Avoid climbing on chairs or reaching over hot surfaces.

9. Reduce lifting and carrying

Use smaller containers, lightweight cookware, and a cart or tray when appropriate. Keep heavy appliances on a stable counter instead of moving them for every use.

10. Improve labels and control visibility

Use large, high-contrast labels for frequently used controls and containers. Confirm that markings remain readable in normal kitchen lighting and do not cover safety warnings.

Reduce Burns and Cooking Fires

11. Stay in the kitchen while high-heat cooking

Remain nearby when frying, boiling, grilling, or broiling. If you must leave, turn the burner off. Use a loud timer as a reminder, not as a substitute for supervision.

12. Turn pot handles inward

Position handles toward the back or side so they cannot be bumped, caught by clothing, or pulled over the edge. Keep handles away from adjacent hot burners.

13. Keep combustibles away from the stove

Move towels, paper, packaging, wooden utensils, curtains, and loose clothing away from burners and hot appliances.

14. Keep a lid or baking sheet nearby

For a small pan fire, slide a lid or baking sheet over the pan and turn off the heat if it is safe to do so. Do not move the pan, and never put water on a grease fire. Leave immediately and call emergency services if the fire is not controlled.

15. Consider automatic shutoff support

If memory, attention, or medication side effects make unattended cooking possible, discuss stove shutoff devices or safer meal routines with the older adult, family, and an appropriate professional. Technology does not replace supervision when supervision is needed.

Check Appliances and Electrical Safety

16. Inspect plugs and cords

Stop using appliances with frayed insulation, cracked plugs, exposed wires, scorch marks, or loose connections. Arrange repair or replacement rather than taping over damage.

17. Plug major appliances directly into wall outlets

Do not power refrigerators, stoves, or other major appliances through extension cords or overloaded power strips. Follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.

18. Confirm kitchen outlets have GFCI protection

Ask a qualified electrician to check whether countertop outlets and outlets near water have appropriate ground-fault protection, especially in an older home.

19. Keep appliances and hands dry

Unplug countertop appliances before cleaning when instructed, keep cords and plugs away from water, and never handle electrical equipment with wet hands.

20. Choose controls the user can operate reliably

Check that buttons, knobs, displays, sounds, and required steps match the person's grip, vision, hearing, and memory. Avoid adding a complicated device merely because it is marketed as smart.

Protect Food and Prevent Scalds

21. Verify refrigerator and freezer temperatures

Use appliance thermometers. Keep the refrigerator at 40°F (4°C) or below and the freezer at 0°F (-18°C). Check periodically rather than relying only on the control dial.

22. Separate raw and ready-to-eat foods

Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from produce and cooked food. Use separate cutting boards or wash boards, utensils, and surfaces thoroughly between tasks.

23. Use a food thermometer

Check safe minimum internal temperatures instead of judging doneness by color or cooking time alone. Keep a current FoodSafety.gov temperature chart near the cooking area.

24. Refrigerate perishables promptly

Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within two hours, or within one hour when the surrounding temperature is above 90°F (32°C). Label leftovers with the date when memory is a concern.

25. Reduce tap-water scald risk

The National Institute on Aging advises setting the water heater to 120°F. Have a qualified person adjust it when needed, and test water before washing dishes or hands.

Prepare for Emergencies and Changing Needs

26. Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

Install alarms in the locations recommended by safety authorities and the manufacturer. Test them regularly, replace batteries and units as directed, and consider alerting devices if hearing is limited.

27. Keep exits clear

Make sure the path from the kitchen to an exit is free of furniture, stored items, cords, and locked obstacles. Everyone in the home should know the escape route.

28. Place emergency contacts where they are visible

Post local emergency numbers, the home address, family contacts, and relevant medical information near a phone. Keep a charged phone within reach while cooking.

29. Review medicines, vision, and balance concerns

If dizziness, drowsiness, low vision, weak grip, or balance problems affect kitchen tasks, discuss them with the relevant health professional. Adapt the task instead of relying on willpower.

30. Repeat this review after any meaningful change

Recheck the kitchen after a fall, hospital stay, new diagnosis, medication change, decline in vision or memory, or introduction of a mobility aid. A setup that worked last year may no longer be safe.

Action Notes

Use this page to prioritize changes. For electrical work, gas appliances, structural repairs, or individualized health needs, use an appropriately qualified professional.

Priority	Change needed	Owner	Target date

Important safety note

This checklist provides general educational information and does not replace an individualized home assessment, medical advice, electrical work, fire-department guidance, or appliance instructions. Call emergency services for an active fire, suspected gas leak, electric shock, or immediate danger.

Sources and further reading

- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission - Older Adult Safety
- National Institute on Aging - Preventing Falls at Home: Room by Room
- National Institute on Aging - Alzheimer's Caregiving: Home Safety Tips
- CDC - Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist
- U.S. Fire Administration - Cooking Fire Safety
- FDA - Refrigerator Thermometers: Cold Facts about Food Safety
- FoodSafety.gov - Four Steps to Food Safety

Prepared September 2026. Revisit the checklist after a fall, hospital stay, health or medication change, or introduction of a mobility aid.