

# AGING IN PLACE IN MASON COUNTY: PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

By Susan Evans, Mason County Senior Services

**F**or many older adults, there's no place like home. Familiar surroundings, cherished memories, and the sense of independence that comes with living in your own home are often our most valued source of contentment and pride in later years.

According to the Pew Research Center (February 2026), 60% of older adults would prefer to stay in their own home if they could no longer live without a caregiver. This is often called "aging in place." With a little planning and the right support, many people are able to live safely and comfortably at home for many years.

The high cost of retirement communities and assisted living may also make aging in place more attractive or even a necessity.

The results of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) 2024 Community Needs Assessment indicate 57% of older adults in Mason County are concerned about their ability to continue to live in the "setting of their choice."

Other results related to successfully living independently include:

- 61% are concerned about falling
- 44% are concerned about driving
- 57% are concerned about maintaining their home
- 59% are concerned about their memory or dementia

Aging in place requires (1) preparation, (2) maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and (3) a willingness to use available

resources. These three steps can help you improve your safety, maintain your independence, and will hopefully allow you to enjoy the comfort and familiarity of home for years to come.

## 1. PREPARE YOUR ENVIRONMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL AGING

One of the best resources for making your home a safe place as you age is the AARP HomeFit Guide at [www.aarp.org/homefit](http://www.aarp.org/homefit). Here are a few quick tips to reduce falls and injuries:

**IN THE SHOWER:** Use a shower chair and handheld nozzle to sit safely; install grab bars on the shower wall; replace glass shower enclosures with nonshattering material; and use nonslip safety tread stickers instead of mats, which increase the risk of a fall.

**IN THE BATHROOM:** Install a tall toilet, use a toilet riser, and use a toilet safety rail or install a grab bar nearby.

**IN THE KITCHEN:** Install slide-out drawers for easier access, and make sure major appliances are easily accessible and within reach if you're using a wheelchair or could in the future.

**THROUGHOUT YOUR HOME:** Remove loose rugs and clutter from walkways, secure electrical cords, and make sure stairways and hallways are well lit. Consider adding handrails on both sides of stairways. If climbing stairs becomes difficult, consider moving your bedroom to the main floor so you can live on one level.

**WHEN TRAVELING:** Request a wheelchair and assistance at the airport, make sure your hotel has an elevator or ask for a ground-level room, and pay special attention while visiting historical

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hotels as they may have uneven floors or may have accessibility issues. Use a nightlight or a dim lamp in a hotel room to prevent tripping in an unfamiliar hotel room during the night. Stand up slowly after long periods of sitting on planes, trains, or automobiles to avoid dizziness. Wear sturdy, nonslip shoes. Bring a collapsible cane or a lightweight folding walker if you expect to do a lot of walking or if you are likely to experience fatigue.

## 2. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

We all have a personal responsibility to take care of our health as we age. Staying physically active helps improve strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health. Activities such as walking, gentle stretching, chair exercises, or light strength training can make everyday tasks easier and reduce the risk of falls and injuries. Check with your healthcare provider before starting a new exercise program. Your nearest senior center and community calendar have ways for you to stay active. If you'd rather exercise at home, you can build your own toolkit of inexpensive equipment such as resistance bands, a step platform, a yoga mat, light dumbbells, or even a pedal exerciser.

Be sure to schedule regular medical and dental screenings, have your vision and hearing tested, and take medications exactly as prescribed.

Health experts recommend annual vision screenings after age 50 and hearing screenings every 5 years for adults aged 50 to 64 years, and every 1 to 3 years for adults aged 65 years and older.

According to the National Council on Aging (NCOA), "Eating a balanced diet helps us maintain strength, energy, cognitive functioning, and a healthy weight, while also supporting immunity and lowering our risk of chronic disease. All of this can help us stay active and independent for longer." They suggest drinking more water as we age, eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy, and limiting added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

## 3. USE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Stay connected with family, friends, neighbors, faith communities, or local organizations to improve both your physical and emotional well-being. Coffee with a friend or participation in a community activity can reduce feelings of loneliness and help build a support network.

Use available resources to help you stay in your home longer and avoid injuries. Here are a few key resources available in Mason County to help older adults continue living at home:

**Mason County Senior Meals** provides home-delivered meals to homebound adults aged 60 and older by donation as space allows. Call 231-757-4831.

**Ludington Mass Transit Authority (LMTA) Senior Rides program** provides rides to seniors aged 60 and older throughout Mason County. Rides are available by donation, require scheduling in advance, and require completion of a basic information form. Call LMTA at 231-845-1231. The **Scottville Area Senior Center (SASC)** and **HELP Ministry** provide non-emergency medical transportation based on volunteer availability. Contact SASC at 231-757-4705 and HELP Ministry at 231-843-6811.

The **SASC Respite Care and Homemaker program** provides in-home respite and homemaker services. Call 231-757-4705. **AAAWM Care Management program** provides personal care, respite, housekeeping, and meal preparation for eligible individuals. Call 888-456-5664.

**All four senior centers, the Custer VFW Gold Bar Post 5096, and the American Legion Post 76** provide medical-equipment loans based on availability.

**Community PACE (Program for All-inclusive Care for the Elderly)** is a Medicare and Medicaid program that helps older adults aged 55 and older to get

health care and support in their local community instead of moving into a nursing home. Call Community PACE at 231-652-4618 for more information.

The **MI Choice Medicaid Waiver** is a Michigan program for home and community-based care for low-income adults who need nursing-home-level care but prefer to live at home or in a residential setting. To learn more, call AAAM at 888-456-5664.

**FiveCAP, Inc.** offers the **Home Weatherization program** for repair and insulation for low-income individuals (call Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency at 1-877-213-5948 for information), the **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** for minor roof repair, furnace repair and replacement, **Low Income Senior Housing at Lawndale Apartments, Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**, and **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**. Call FiveCAP Inc. at 231-757-3785.

**Longfellow Towers** offers Section 8 income-based housing with priority given to individuals aged 62 and older. Applications are usually available onsite in the entryway, and there is a waiting list so apply early if you're interested. Call Longfellow at 231-845-7900.

The **Mason County Senior Services Errands program** provides delivery of groceries or prescriptions to homebound seniors based on volunteer availability. Call 231-316-6523 for information.

If you or someone you know has questions about resources for seniors, please email Susan Evans at [sevens@masoncountymi.gov](mailto:sevens@masoncountymi.gov) or call 231-316-6523. Seniors can also call AAAM at 888-456-5664, 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Mon–Fri, for help finding programs and services. Another helpful resource is *Active for Life*, a senior publication found throughout the county and at [www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com](http://www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com) or [www.ludingtonseniorcenter.org](http://www.ludingtonseniorcenter.org).



## Prep Your Environment

- ☐ Use a shower chair and a handheld shower nozzle to sit safely.
- ☐ Install grab bars on shower wall.
- ☐ Replace glass shower enclosures with nonshattering material.
- ☐ Use nonslip safety tread stickers instead of mats.
- ☐ Install a tall toilet, use a toilet riser, and use a toilet safety rail or install a grab bar nearby.
- ☐ Install slide-out drawers in kitchen cabinets for easier access.
- ☐ Make sure major kitchen appliances are accessible by wheelchair if you use one now or may in the future.
- ☐ Remove loose rugs and clutter from walkways.
- ☐ Secure electrical cords.
- ☐ Make sure stairways and hallways are well lit.
- ☐ Consider adding handrails on both sides of stairways.
- ☐ If climbing stairs becomes difficult, consider relocating your bedroom and/or your laundry facilities to the main floor to live on one level.
- ☐ When you get up after prolonged periods of sitting down or laying in bed, stand up slowly to avoid dizziness; and, if needed, use a cane or walker for assistance.
- ☐ Use nightlights for navigating at home in the dark and in unfamiliar layouts while staying with friends or family or when traveling and staying in hotels.
- ☐ Wear well-fitting sturdy, nonslip shoes or slippers.
- ☐ Rest whenever and wherever you feel fatigued to keep yourself safe.

