

Bathroom Safety

Maintaining safety in the bathroom is very important because the combination of slippery floors and hard surfaces can sometimes make for a hazardous environment. Following are some simple suggestions that may help keep your bathroom safe.



For the Shower

- Shower stools or chairs (with or without lockable castors) allow a person to sit down whilst showering, preventing fatigue and reducing the risk of falls. Arm rests and height-adjustable legs provide additional support while transferring.
- Permanent shower benches can be fixed to the wall and folded back out of the way when not needed.
- Grab rails provide a safe means of support for transferring in/out and while using the shower. It is important to consider the location of rails and to ensure that they are installed securely and with the appropriate fasteners. Refer to Australian Standard 1428—*Design for Access and Mobility* for information if required. A variety of slip-resistant rails is available.
- Slip-resistant flooring, mats or tiles placed on the shower floor help to prevent falls. It is important to ensure that all loose corners on mats are secured to prevent tripping.
- Hand-held showerheads can be used to direct water where required while sitting or standing. Different styles include permanent options that replace the existing showerhead or temporary options that fit onto existing fittings with push-on cups or rubber tightened with metal bands. A permanent hand-held showerhead may be mounted on a secure grab rail or bracket to allow different height adjustments.
- It is important to check the compatibility of the hand-held showerhead with the type of hot water system because certain situations (eg a toilet flushing) may cause sudden and extreme fluctuations in water temperature. Not all gravity-fed hot water systems are compatible with all hand-held showerheads.
- Consider the type of handset for hand-held showerheads—think about the weight and type of grip. Also ensure the placement is within easy reach. The shower hose should be long enough to use while seated. It is important that water spray is not directed towards power outlets.

- Other considerations include a wooden shower platform to eliminate the step into the shower and the use of a shower curtain rather than a shower screen.
- A long-handled back sponge or toe washer, soap-on-a-rope, or soap in a 'wash mitten' can also help eliminate unnecessary bending and potential fall hazards.

For the Bath

- Some homes have a combined shower over the bath, which can increase the risk of falls. Using a bath board across the top of the bath allows the user to have a seated shower over the bath, and helps when getting in and out.
- If a bath board does not fit, a height-adjustable bath bench that sits on freestanding legs may be an option.
- An electric bath hoist can make it easier to lower a person into and out of the bath. Some hoists come with a reclining backrest.
- Fixed grab rails provide support when transferring to and from the bath. If it is not possible to install permanent rails, clamp on hand rails can be attached to the side of the bath.
- Slip-resistant mats, liquid applications and adhesive strips can be applied to the bath surface to reduce the risk of slipping.

Hot Water and scalding

Thermostatic mixers have a built-in stabiliser so water cannot run too hot or too cold. Computerised models have a control panel to program temperature and flow rates.

Thermostatic mixers have a single control for adjusting the temperature and/or the volume of water passing through units. They can be used to control one outlet or the entire house.

If scalding is a concern, adjusting the hot water system at the thermostat may be an option. On some hot water systems, the maximum water temperature can be adjusted.

Anti-scald devices can also be fitted to the hot water pipes. These devices have a valve that reacts to water temperature at a certain level. If the valve detects a rise in temperature, it automatically reduces water flow.

Taps

Turning taps on and off may be difficult for a number of reasons, including painful hands, weak grasp, taps turned off too tightly or the style of tap may simply be too difficult to grip. Options include:

- Quarter-turn taps allow the tap to be turned on and off within 90 degrees, decreasing the amount of hand twisting required.
- A lever-style handle on a tap is often easier to manage and can sometimes be extended to enable use with the side of the hand or elbow, reducing the pressure placed on the small joints of the hand. These can be quarter-turn or standard.

- A 'tap turner' is a device that fits over the existing tap head creating a lever tap. These are available in a large range of options to suit various tap heads. It is important to know exactly which tap head you have before looking into this option. Some tap turners are adjustable to fit a number of different heads. In some cases a piece of slip resistant material may be enough to provide extra grip.
- Replacing or installing new taps is not always practical. Consider modifying existing taps. The first step may be to replace existing rubber washers with an 'o' ring or hydro-seal. Less force is then required to turn the tap on and off.
- More expensive options include foot-controlled taps or infra-red/electronic sensor taps which are sensitive to movement and allow water to flow when hands are placed in the basin.
- When designing a new bathroom it is important to take the style of tap into consideration, as future difficulties may be eliminated with a bit of forward planning. Attention should be paid to the ability of the user to reach and use the taps effectively and safely (eg a person in a wheelchair must be able to reach and use taps from a seated position). Ensure that there is adequate clearance between tap handles (especially if using a lever handle) and nearby walls, bench tops, basins or other plumbing fixtures.

For the Toilet

- Toilet seat raisers can be attached to the top of the toilet bowl to raise the height of the seat. This makes it easier to sit and rise from the toilet.
- Toilet seat raisers that are permanently fixed to the toilet provide a more permanent and stable option, but can be more expensive.
- Height-adjustable frames with handrails can be put around the toilet to help support people sitting and rising from the toilet. The frames are available with or without an attached toilet seat, commode pan or splash guard.
- Grab rails can be attached to the walls near the toilet to help people to sit and rise from the toilet. These can be fixed or swing-away.

Slip-Resistant Flooring

- When designing a bathroom, there are ways to make flooring safer by installing slip-resistant tiles. However, there are also methods that can be used with the existing floor covering, such as slip-resistant mats, liquid applications and adhesive strips.
- It is important to consider the ease of application, cleaning and maintenance, the finished appearance, durability and whether some treatments may be too abrasive for bare feet or create a tripping hazard.

Other

Other ideas to make your bathroom safer include:

- Replacing towel rails with fixed grab rails for extra support.
- Using a height-adjustable bathroom chair/stool to sit on while drying and dressing after a shower.
- Installing child-proof locks for bathroom cabinets to avoid accidental poisoning.
- Scald-warning devices that change colour when the water goes above a specified temperature.
- Plastic inflatable covers that cover bathtub taps in order to protect users from head injury.

Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre
11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Email: ilcsa@dcsi.sa.gov.au

Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus services run nearby. Call 8210 1000 for timetable information.

