

Lighting Your Home

Beautiful lamps and light fixtures can do wonders to spruce up your home. But more importantly, they help you see better.

The older you get, the more important proper lighting becomes. That's because as you age, you need more light to see.

A well-lit home is also a safer home. Proper lighting helps keep burglars away and prevents accidents like tripping and falling, which could cause serious injury.

Does your home have proper lighting? That means not only having enough light, but light that's well-placed and spread evenly throughout your rooms without glare or shadows.

Take inventory by walking through and checking each room and living space in your home. Here's what to look for and tips for making improvements:

Work Areas

Check all work areas — kitchen counter, desk, workbench — as well as garage, basement, and laundry room. In addition to good general lighting, you should have a second light source shining directly on what you need to see.

- Mount lights under kitchen cabinets to brighten counter space and avoid shadows.
- Add brighter desk lamps or utility lights, especially where you work with tools or machines. Adjustable lamps work well. To cut glare, position them to your side instead of directly in front of you. If you add brighter bulbs to existing lights, make sure you don't add more watts than instructions on the lamps or light fixtures call for.

Reading Areas

Reading isn't relaxing if you're straining your eyes to do it.

- Add floor lamps and lamps with flexible necks, which let you direct reading light where you need it.
- Use lamps with three-way bulbs.
- Make sure all lamps have shades to prevent glare.

Stairways

All stairs, stair landings, and entryways in your home — inside and out — should be brightly lit.

- Put a light switch at the top and bottom of each indoor staircase to avoid darkness at either end.

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- Point lights directly on stairs. Be sure they are bright enough to light up the whole staircase.

Outdoors

Besides stairs and entryways, see that all walkways, porches, patios, and decks have plenty of light.

- Shine a light on your address number so it is clearly visible in case of an emergency.
- Be sure a light is also shining on your front door, so you can see who's there.
- Install motion detectors, which let lights go on automatically when someone approaches the house. You can add these onto existing lights or buy a kit that includes the detector and light fixtures.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms are dangerous enough without the added risk of poor lighting. Make sure there's enough light in your bathtub and shower. In addition to lights or a window, a clear or lightly colored shower liner or curtain can brighten the tub and shower area. Bathrooms are also excellent places for nightlights. Turn one on before you turn in.

Windows

Windows allow natural light to brighten your home. Let in as much as you can.

- Pull up shades and pull back curtains.
- Sit near a window to read or sew. Facing away from the window lets light come over your shoulder and land on what you need to see.

- Add “sky windows,” or skylights, to your kitchen, bathroom, or family room. Skylights can noticeably increase a room's natural light.

- Keep all windows clean.


Lighting Don'ts:

Don't stay in the dark by:

- Struggling to reach a light or light switch. Move it so you can turn it on and off easily.
- Getting frustrated with hard-to-manage switches. Replace old flip switches with rocker switches. You can turn these on and off with an elbow, fist, thumb, or even an umbrella. They're especially helpful if your hands are full or you have limited use of them.
- Buying lamps or ceiling lights with hard-to-change bulbs. Some ceiling lights have globe-shaped covers you must remove to change the bulb. This can be hard to do, especially if you have trouble gripping large objects.
- Buying hard-to-clean light fixtures. Less light shines through dirty fixtures. Clean indoor and outdoor lights often.
- Forgetting about your closets. If you have lights in them, turn them on. If not, install lights that are easy to reach.
- Risking your safety by turning lights off to save on your electric bill.

Other Safety Issues

Finally, practice these other light-safety precautions:

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- Make sure lamp cords aren't frayed and that wires aren't exposed.
 - Try not to use extension cords if you don't have to.
 - Don't leave cords sticking out where people can trip over them.
 - Check from time to time to see that lamps and light fixtures are in good working order.
 - Turn off fixtures and light switches before replacing bulbs. If you don't know if the lamp is on or off, unplug it first.
 - Be careful handling bulbs and shades — they can get very hot. Don't get burned!
 - Don't try to do your own electrical work. Hire a licensed professional.

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