Nashville Deck Safety Checklist

For older homeowners, families & caregivers

A 10-minute visual check for railings, stairs, walking surfaces, lighting and signs that a deck may need professional attention.

Why check? Falls can often be prevented. Secure handrails, good lighting, even steps and clear walking surfaces are especially important as we age.

1. Railings & handholds

- ☐ Gently test deck railings and stair handrails. They should feel firm, not wobbly or loose.
- ☐ Look for loose, cracked, missing or damaged balusters/spindles and railing connections.
- ☐ Make sure there is a secure handhold where you naturally need support entering, exiting or using steps.

2. Stairs & steps

- ☐ Check for broken, loose, uneven, sagging or visibly decayed steps.
- ☐ Keep stairs free of planters, shoes, hoses, leaves, toys and other trip hazards.
- ☐ Use non-slip treatment where outdoor steps become slick when wet, and make step edges easy to see.

3. Deck boards & walking surface

- ☐ Look for soft, spongy, split, badly splintered or decaying boards.
- ☐ Check for popped nails, raised screws or boards that rock or move underfoot.
- ☐ Clear leaves, moss, algae and debris that can hold moisture or make the surface slippery.

4. Lighting & visibility

- ☐ Make sure the doorway, landing and all stairs are well lit after dark.
- ☐ Replace burned-out bulbs and consider motion-activated lighting for paths and steps.
- ☐ Reduce glare and shadows, and keep the route from the house to the deck clear.

5. Structure: visible warning signs

- ☐ Look for obvious sagging, leaning, shifting or movement in the deck or stairs.
- ☐ From a safe location, look for damaged posts, beams, joists or the area where the deck connects to the house.
- ☐ After a major storm, falling limb or impact, check for new movement or visible damage before normal use.

6. Everyday fall-prevention habits

- ☐ Wear stable, non-slip footwear outdoors, especially when surfaces are wet.
- ☐ Keep hands free when possible so railings are available for support.
- ☐ Do not use a deck or stair area that feels unstable, unusually soft or unsafe.

What to do if something looks wrong

Stop using the area and get professional help if you notice:

- A railing, stair, landing or section of deck that moves noticeably under light pressure or normal use.
- Soft or badly decayed wood in a structural area, or a board that feels like it could give way.
- Visible sagging, separation from the house, cracked supports, or major storm/impact damage.
- A condition that makes you or a family member feel unsteady or unsafe.

A simple next-step plan

1. **Make the hazard obvious**
   Block off the unsafe area or tell household members and visitors not to use it until it can be evaluated.

2. **Document what you see**
   Take a few photos of the railing, stair, board or structural area. Note whether the problem is new or getting worse.

3. **Ask for the right kind of help**
   For structural movement, rot, railing or stair problems, contact a qualified deck professional or home inspector. For mobility-specific concerns, an occupational or physical therapist may also help assess fall risk.

Nashville resource: Rebuilding Together Nashville

Rebuilding Together Nashville provides home repair and safety assistance to eligible residents. Its common repairs include installing or replacing railings around stairs, steps, ramps and decks. Eligibility and availability vary.

rtnashville.org/home-repairs

About this checklist

This checklist is designed for a quick visual review, not a building-code inspection or structural evaluation. Do not climb under, lean over, dismantle or probe a deck if doing so could put you at risk. When in doubt, have the deck evaluated by a qualified professional.

Safety guidance used to create this resource

- CDC - Older Adult Fall Prevention
- National Institute on Aging - Preventing Falls at Home
- AARP - HomeFit Guide
- NADRA - Deck Safety Consumer Resources

Nashville Deck & Porch A local referral website connecting Nashville-area homeowners with independent deck and porch providers.