Introduction
Between 30-60% of adults over age 65 fall each year. Of the more than 200,000 older adults who experience hip fractures each year:
- Nearly one third result in death
- Less than half return to full function
- 30% of survivors require long-term care.

What you can do to protect yourself?
Check your home for hazards that might cause you to trip, slip, or fall. Also, look at entryways to your home. When you spot a safety hazard, correct it as soon as possible. Here are some items to look for:
- Inadequate lighting
- Clutter
- Loose area rugs
- Electrical and phone cords
- Slippery substances on the floor (i.e., water spills)
- Lack of safeguards in the kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom
- Stairs or steps - Inside or outside.

Provide Adequate Lighting
Changes in vision occur with aging. Older adults require up to three times more light and their eyes do not adjust as quickly to changes in light conditions, such as those experienced when walking from a brightly lit room to a darker room. Keeping lights on in several rooms of your house can help you avoid slips, trips, and falls.
• Keep lights on in the rooms that you are using or walking through.
• Create consistent lighting that is free of shadows and glare. If lights cause glare, try frosted bulbs.
• Keeping lights on at home is not an extravagant expense when you consider that this safety technique helps you avoid tripping.
• As an added bonus, lights in the home are a deterrent to prowlers or burglars.
• Keep outside entrances lighted:
  • for when you come home
  • in case you suddenly have to go out
  • so you can see visitors at the door.
• During the day, open the curtains and shades to let in more sunlight. If glare is a problem, try opening them only partially. This will also control the direction of light.
• Are your lamps working? Do light bulbs need to be replaced? Is there a working light switch to light a room at each entrance? Consider additional lamps and use a nightlight for dark passageways.

Clear loose objects and clutter from the floor
• All passageways and walkways should be clear of loose objects, debris, low or unexpected objects, and furniture.
• Objects and furniture blocking passageways should be removed.
• Furniture placement should be designed to assist with balance.

Check Electrical and Phone Cords
• Electrical and phone cords should be set against a wall where people can't trip over them.
• Furniture should be arranged with lamps and appliances near outlets so that cords are less likely to extend across areas where people walk.

Remove or secure loose area rugs
• Loose rugs, runners and mats in all areas of your home should be removed. They catch heels and toes and cause many in-home falls.
• If you insist upon using area rugs, check them for slip-resistance. If they tend to slide, they should be removed or secured. They can be secured by applying double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to their backs. Matting or tape must be checked periodically for adhesion and wear and be replaced if needed.
Watch out for slippery substances
- Be careful in the kitchen, bathroom, and laundry area where water might be splashed from a sink or other source.
- Floors in these areas should be easy to care for and slip resistant when wet. Avoid waxing floors.

Avoid Kitchen Hazards
- Store items that you use often where they are easily reached. Standing on a chair or some other makeshift stool to reach a high shelf is dangerous. Consider buying a stepstool, particularly one with handrails you can hold onto while standing on the top step. Make sure the stepstool is fully open and stable before you climb onto it. Tighten any screws or braces and get rid of stepstools with broken parts.
- Consider buying a reach extender (grabber), which is a long stick with a gripper on the end that you control with a lever. This may be helpful to reach lightweight items that are not easily broken.

Safety proof your Bathroom and Bedroom
- To help avoid falls in shower or tub:
  - Install grab bars (Never substitute with a towel bar!)
  - Use shower seats, or transfer benches.
  - Place non-skid strips or decals in tub or shower.
  - Use a seat for grooming at the mirror.
- The bathroom light switch should be near the entrance. Consider a switch that glows in the dark, or a nightlight for the bathroom.

Bedroom
- Lamps and/or switches should be near the door and the bed.
- Rearrange furniture to create clear passageways
- Use a night light.
Safeguard Stairs and Steps

- Install handrails for support on both sides of stairs. These should extend beyond the stairs. Check existing handrails and fix if loose.
- For all stairs, inside and out, check lighting for shadows or glare. Light switches should be at the top and bottom of stairways. If lighting near stairways is poor, keep operating flashlights at top and bottom of stairs and install nightlights nearby. Every day older adults trip on stairs they know well.
- Paint the edge of each stair in a color that contrasts with the color of the stairs to help you see where one stair ends and the next one starts. Mark steps that are of different sizes than the others-taller, shorter, or narrower by painting them a contrasting color to the tread.
- Don't store anything on stair steps - even temporarily.

*By following these recommendations you can make your home a safer and more comfortable place to live.*

References


