

Preventing Falls in Your Home

One in three Americans over the age of 65 will fall every year. These falls can result in emergency room visits, surgery, hospitalization or disabilities. One serious consequence of falling is a hip fracture. Of the more than 200,000 older adults who experience hip fractures each year, less than half return to full function, 30% of survivors require long-term care and nearly one third result in death. Most often accidental falls are due to hazards that are overlooked, like a spill on the floor, but are easily fixed. Being aware of these environmental risk factors, or making changes, can reduce your risk of having an accidental fall.



How can you reduce your risk at home?

Accidental falls are the leading cause of home injury and death for those 65 and older.

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.

Also keep large print, emergency numbers near each phone. Have a phone near the floor in case you fall and are not able to get up. Consider wearing an alarm device that you can use to call for help or establish a daily “buddy check” system with a neighbor.

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.

- ▶ Keep lights on in the rooms that you are using or walking through; it is not an extravagant expense when you consider the safety technique helps you avoid falling.
- ▶ Create consistent lighting that is free of shadows and glare. If lights cause glare try frosted bulbs.
- ▶ Keep outside entrances lighted for when you come home or 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.
- ▶ 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 & Clutter from the Floor

- ▶ Keep things off the floor like magazines, books, shoes, boxes or other objects.
- ▶ Anything blocking passageways through a room or hallway should be removed.
- ▶ Furniture placement should be designed to assist with balance.

Check Electrical & Phone Cords

- ▶ Electrical and phone cords should be set against a wall, or behind furniture, where people can't trip over them.
- ▶ Watch for vacuum cleaner (or any household electrical item) cords that may get in the way during use. Also watch for dog leashes, garden hoses or even oxygen tubes!



Remove or Secure Loose Area Rugs

LOOSE RUGS, runners, or 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 rugs, particularly for the bathroom, check them for slip-resistance. Always secure rugs using double-faced adhesive *carpet tape* or *rubber matting*. Check them often for wear and tear and replace tape or backing when needed.*

Watch 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 and clean up grease, water and other spills immediately.

Safety Proof Your Bedroom & Bathroom

- ▶ Lamps and/or switches should be near doors and the bed.
- ▶ Rearrange furniture to create clear passageways.
- ▶ Use a night light, especially the ones that come on automatically when it gets dark (also consider a flashlight on the bedside table).

Avoid falls in the shower or tub by:

- ▶ Installing grab bars (*Never substitute with a towel bar!*)
- ▶ Using shower seats, or transfer benches
- ▶ Placing non-skid strips or decals in tub or shower



Avoid Kitchen/Garage/Storage/Repair Hazards

Store cabinet, closet or shelf items that you use often where they are easily reached.



- ▶ **STANDING ON A CHAIR** or some other makeshift stool is **DANGEROUS**. Consider buying a stepstool, particularly one with handrails. 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. Always wear proper footwear when using stepstools or ladders.
- ▶ Consider buying a reach extender (grabber), which is a long rod with a gripper on the end that you control with a lever. This may be helpful to reach light/medium weight items.

Do not attempt to do activities you are unsure about, like standing on a ladder to change a light bulb. Ask for help from a neighbor or friend. *Don't risk an injury!*

Safeguard Stairs & Steps

Every day older adults trip on stairs they know well. Both in and outside your home always remember to:



- ▶ Use handrails for support. Install handrails at home if you don't have them on both sides and/or fix them if not secure to the wall.
- ▶ For all stairs, inside and out, have adequate lighting. At home, light switches, operating flashlights or nearby nightlights should be at the top and bottom of stairways.
- ▶ Look for objects that might be on stairway. Don't store items on stair steps.
- ▶ For the more visually impaired, 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.



Always pay attention to your surroundings and never be in a hurry as this can cause accidents!

Outside of the Home Be Cautious of:

- ▶ Uneven pavement or sidewalks, loose gravel, curb height differences
- ▶ Being in unfamiliar surroundings
- ▶ Unexpected spills on the floor, loose objects, slippery flooring or rubber mats

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Senior Wellness Series

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