

Tips to Reduce the Risks of Falling

Because 75% of falls occur at home, it's important to take preventative steps which can reduce the risk of falling. Compromised health and even death are sometimes the results of falls for people seventy and older. Assisted living and life-care communities recognize the significance and increase in fall risk in the elder population and often offer classes in fall prevention to their residents. In one's own home, it is just as important to be aware of the benefits that a few modifications, along with common sense, can make in staying fall-free.

LIGHTING

- Turn lights on before entering a room
 - Light switches should be at the entrance to every room
 - If switches are not located at the entrance, consider installing them there
- Lighting should not cause a glare, which can worsen visibility
 - ❖ Tip: Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, shades on lighting fixtures, or partially closing window
- Replace burned-out bulbs immediately
- Use night lights to improve visibility in hallways, bathrooms and bedrooms
- In case of outages, (a) Install power-failure lights in electrical outlets and near stairs and (b) Keep working flashlights and extra batteries on hand
- Make sure there is adequate lighting outside the entrance to your home
 - Consider installing motion-sensitive lighting if you don't already have it

WALKWAYS

- Check all carpets, rugs and mats
 - Make sure they lie flat
 - Make sure carpets are securely fastened to the floor
 - Avoid throw rugs, or use non-skid backing on them and replace as needed
- Mark sudden changes in surfaces such as stairs, curbs or ramps
 - ❖ Tip: Use brightly colored tape or paint
- Keep walkways clear of clutter, including phone and electrical cords
- Use established walkways rather than shortcuts
- Be careful around children and pets
- Clean up spills immediately

BATHROOM

- Install grab bars in the bathtub/shower if you don't already have them
 - Both sides is ideal—and check them periodically to test for stability
- Use non-slip strips or mats in bathtub/shower and replace as needed
- Install grab bars, handrails or a raised toilet seat with arms if you have difficulty getting on or off the toilet
- Use a bath bench if balance is an issue for you
- Use a flexible, handheld shower for greater comfort and convenience

STAIRS

- Install handrails on both sides of outside and inside stairs
 - Check periodically to make sure they are not loose
- Mark the top and bottom of stairs (or all stairs if they are not easily distinguishable) with brightly colored tape or paint

FOOTWEAR AND ASSISTIVE DEVICES

- Wear footwear with soles and heels that provide good support and traction
 - Make sure they fit well
- Avoid walking in socks, smooth-soled shoes or slippers on stairs, hardwood or waxed surfaces
 - ♣ Tip: Consider wearing supportive footwear all the time (indoors and outdoors)
- *Don't* hold onto furniture as you walk, as it will increase your risk of falling—instead, use a cane or walker to help maintain your balance
 - ♣ Tip: Your doctor or physical therapist can teach you to use them properly
- Be sure that any assistive device you use (walker or cane) is properly matched to your height

HAZARDOUS SURFACES

- Be cautious on icy, wet and debris-covered surfaces
- When exiting a vehicle, test the ground for wetness or iciness before standing and walking
- Be careful on smooth indoor surfaces such as tile, marble, hardwood and linoleum
- Be careful stepping up or down on curbs

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH MEASURES

- Test your vision and hearing at least annually and have it corrected as needed
- Learn what side effects your medications may have, and whether they could affect your balance or coordination
- Limit or eliminate your alcohol intake
- Advise your doctor about any falls you have taken
- Begin a dialogue with your doctor, if you haven't already, to monitor your ambulation and agility during routine checkups
 - Order a complete evaluation if you feel your movement or balance has been compromised
- Take up a light exercise, as recommended or approved by your doctor, which will contribute to your overall balance and cardiovascular health

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- Be alert to potential hazards when you are in an unfamiliar environment
- Be cautious when entering and exiting elevators
- Don't rush to answer the phone or door
 - ♣ Tip: Let the phone ring—if you are concerned about missing a call, invest in an answering machine if you don't have one already
- Take your time crossing the street
- Take time to regain your balance when getting up, especially after eating or lying down
- If you experience dizziness from a sudden change in position, increase your blood flow by clenching hands and wiggling toes (if standing) or moving arms and legs (if sitting)
- Don't use a chair to get at hard-to-reach items—use a sturdy stool or step ladder
 - ♣ Tip: Store frequently used items around waist level to avoid bending and reaching
- When carrying bulky items, make sure they don't obstruct your view
 - Order a complete evaluation if you feel your movement or balance has been compromised
- Sign up for a fall prevention class at your community senior center or local hospital