

Tools and Equipment to Increase Safety

One in four Americans aged 65+ falls each year. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults. Even when a person is not injured, the fall can carry a heavy quality of life impact. A growing number of older adults fear falling and, thus, limit their activities and social engagements. This can result in further physical decline, depression, social isolation, and feelings of helplessness.

Despite factors that especially put seniors at risk, falls are not an inevitable part of growing older. Here are some mobility products that can help keep seniors more stable.

- **Monitors and Sensor Pads**

Sensors can be used on beds, chairs and toilet seats. The pads electronically detect the absence of pressure, which in turn sends a signal to the monitor, setting off an alarm. On a bed, pressure pads can be under or on top of the mattress. They are very thin, so they do not disturb sleep, and they are plugged into the monitor via a telephone-type line. Chair and toilet sensors work in the same way.

There are also products that detect when a person steps on the pad and sound an alarm. This type of sensor can be used beside the bed, in a hallway or in front of a chair to monitor when a person gets up or leaves a room unassisted.

- **Fall Mats**

Fall mats are used in areas where a person could be injured from a fall on a hard floor. They are cushioned floor mats of various sizes (1 or 2 inches thick) with beveled edges that can be used along the side of the bed, by a toilet or in front of a chair. They help to cushion falls and prevent injuries.

- **Grab Bars**

These devices provide extra stability and assistance during transfers. They are typically installed in areas where a senior may need something to hold on to for added balance. Bathrooms are a common location for grab bars, since they can help seniors sit down and get up from the toilet and enter and exit the bathtub or shower safely.

- Shower Chair or Transfer Bench

A shower chair offers a senior a place to rest and regain balance while bathing. Transfer benches provide stability and support to help seniors with strength or balance issues safely enter and exit the tub or shower.

- Anti-Slip Mats and Treads

Install these on the bathtub or shower floor. The hard rubber material provides additional traction and prevents slipping.

- Canes and Walkers

Mobility aids help seniors feel steady on their feet. Make sure the device is the correct height for your elderly parent and has rubber tips or other traction on the bottom for safety. A physical or occupational therapist can assist in selecting and fitting a mobility aid.

- Socks, Shoes and Slippers

Wearing properly fitted, low-heeled, non-slip footwear for walking and transferring provides traction and is much safer than going barefoot or wearing normal socks. Many socks and shoes are available with non-skid treads on the bottom to reduce slipping accidents. Avoid slip-on shoes that can easily come on and off and cause your loved one to trip.

- Lifts and Patient Transfer Slings

Lift slings are used to move a person who is unable to move themselves from the bed to a wheelchair or chair. If a senior is too heavy to be transferred without assistance, a lift may be necessary to prevent injuries to both the senior and their caregiver.