

Preventing Falls at Home

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. Caregivers can do several things to make a senior's home safer and reduce their fall risk.

- Install safety bars, grab bars or handrails in the bathroom and shower.
- Put non-slip tape or treads on the floor of the bathtub.
- Use an elevated toilet seat (with or without arms) to make getting on and off the toilet easier.
- Install at least one sturdy stairway handrail that extends beyond the first and last steps.
- Be sure that stairwells are well lit. Consider making the lighting in your home brighter to aid vision.
- Make sure rugs, including those on stairs, are tacked to the floor.
- Remove any loose throw rugs.
- Avoid clutter. Remove any furniture that is not needed. All remaining furniture should be stable and without sharp corners to minimize the effects of a fall.
- Change the location of furniture so that your elderly parent can hold on to something as they move around the house.
- Remove or relocate electrical cords so that they do not trail across the floor. If necessary, relocate lamps or appliances or have additional plugs installed so that cords are not a tripping hazard.
- Have your parent wear non-slip shoes or slippers, rather than walking around in socks.
- Make sure all rooms have adequate lighting. Consider motion-activated lights that come on when a person enters a room. Use night lights in every room.
- Keep frequently used items in easy-to-reach cabinets to avoid unnecessary bending and reaching.
- Get a grasping tool for out-of-reach items, rather than your family member using a chair or stepladder.
- Clean up spills and messes immediately.