

# Stand Up to Falling

## Home Safety and Fall Prevention

Amy F. Hosier, Family Life Specialist, Department of Family Studies



About 50 to 75 percent of falls happen in the home. Many of these falls are caused by home hazards that we overlook every day. Falls can be reduced and prevented by identifying and correcting hazards in your home. Remember, falls are preventable!

Check for safety by walking through each room in your house and around the outside. Use the checklist on pages 3 through 5 to evaluate your home and its surroundings. For each hazard you check in the left column, employ the corrections and safety tips from the right column to reduce your risk of falling. Correct any hazard you find as soon as possible.

### Tips for preventing falls in the home

- Wear sturdy shoes with thin, non-slip soles and low heels. Athletic shoes, jogging shoes, and slippers can be dangerous. If you do wear slippers, they should fit well and have soles that provide traction. Avoid walking in stocking feet.
- Keep a cell phone or cordless phone on your person, walker, or a low table near the floor in case you fall and cannot get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm that will allow you to call for help in case you fall and cannot get up.
- Take time to regain balance when you sit or stand up after lying down or sitting. Wiggle your toes and clench your hands to help reduce dizziness caused by sudden changes in position.
- If you feel dizzy at times, be sure to use a balance aide, such as a cane, walking stick, or walker.
- Pay attention to outdoor surfaces (ice, snow, wet, dry leaves, moss) that may make outdoor activities dangerous.
- Let the telephone ring. Do not race to answer a call. Use a portable or cell phone, rely on “missed call” information, \*69, or your voice mail.
- Be alert when transitioning from room to room or from inside to outside in your house or in a public building. Older eyes need time to adjust to sharp transitions of light to dark or dark to light spaces.
- Be alert entering/exiting areas that have curbs.
- Be alert entering/exiting areas that have elevators and escalators.

## Falling Facts

The risk of falling and of being seriously injured in a fall increases with age, but older adults (65+) are not falling because they are old. Some older adults may be at increased risk of falling because of a neurological disorder or a disease that causes trouble with walking, posture, and balance. Others may fall because of a number of preventable risk factors including

- Lack of exercise
- Unsafe home environments
- Vision problems
- Lack of balance
- Medication usage

By addressing such risk factors, a person can lower his/her chance of falling or prevent a fall from occurring.

In a given year, one in three older adults can expect to fall. Falls are the leading cause of injury and injury-related death among older adults. Falls are also the leading cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma among older adults. Men age 65 and older are more likely to die from a fall; older women are more likely to experience a nonfatal fall injury, such as a hip fracture. Regardless of gender, after the age of 60, both the incidence of falling and the severity of fall-related complications increase. Such falls among seniors jeopardize health and independence.

The Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC) reports that older patients who are hospitalized for falling are six times more likely than younger patients to be discharged into a nursing home for intermediate or long-term care.

## For more

### information contact:

- Certified aging in place specialist
- Optometrist
- Ophthalmologist
- General physician
- Pharmacist
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Kentucky Injury and Research Prevention Center

## References

- American Geriatrics Society. (2007). *Fall preventions: Decrease your risk of falling*. Retrieved August 25, 2009, from The American Geriatrics Society Web site: [http://www.healthinaging.org/public\\_education/falls\\_index.php](http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/falls_index.php).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2005) [cited 2007 Jan 15]. Available from URL: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *Fall Among Older Adults: An Overview*. Retrieved August 31, 2009, from Centers for Disease and Prevention Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>.
- Home Safety Council (2009). *Prevent falls at home*. Retrieved August 25, 2009, from the Home Safety Council Web site: [http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/SafeSeniors/sen\\_falls\\_w001.asp](http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/SafeSeniors/sen_falls_w001.asp).
- Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center (KIPRC). (May 11, 2009). Coalition formed to help prevent falls among seniors (press release). Retrieved January 20, 2009 from <http://chfs.ky.gov/news/Falls+09.htm>.
- Mayo Clinic.com. (2008). *Fall Prevention: 6 ways to reduce your fall risk*. Retrieved August 31, 2009 from Healthy Aging Web site: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fall-prevention/HQ00657>.
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2009). *Check for safety: A home fall prevention checklist for older adults*. Retrieved August 25, 2009 from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention Web sites: <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/CheckList-ForSafety.html> and <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/falls/fallprev4.pdf>.
- Newton, R. (2004). *Fall prevention project: In-home safety check*. Department of Physical Therapy, Temple University.
- Stevens, J.A., & Sogolow, E.D. (2005). Gender differences for non-fatal unintentional fall related injuries among older adults. *Injury Prevention* 11: 115–9.

## Floors, Stairs, and Lighting

<b>Hazards</b>	<b>Corrections</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Broken, uneven, or worn steps	<input type="checkbox"/> Replace or repair broken, uneven, or worn steps.
<input type="checkbox"/> Loose or torn carpet on the steps or floor	<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure that carpet on the floor and stairs is firmly tacked. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove loose carpet from the stairs and replace with non-slip rubber stair treads.
<input type="checkbox"/> Uneven floors	<input type="checkbox"/> Fix or replace uneven floors.
<input type="checkbox"/> Cracks, dips, and holes on outside stairs or sidewalks	<input type="checkbox"/> Repair all cracks, dips, and holes in outside stairs and sidewalks.
<input type="checkbox"/> Broken, loose, or missing handrails	<input type="checkbox"/> Fix loose or broken handrails.
<input type="checkbox"/> Handrails only on one side of the stairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Handrails should be located on both sides of the stairs. <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure handrails extend beyond the top and bottom steps. <input type="checkbox"/> Rails should be anchored 1 to 2 inches away from walls.
<input type="checkbox"/> Papers, pets, magazines, books, shoes, boxes, blankets, towels, oxygen machines/tanks, or other objects on the floor or stairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Keep the stairs and floor free of objects and clutter. <input type="checkbox"/> Look out for pets and small children who can move quickly and unexpectedly. <input type="checkbox"/> Put regularly used items on shelves within easy reach between hip and eye level. <input type="checkbox"/> Use long-handled reachers to grasp objects that are on high shelves or on the floor. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep rooms well-lit to increase your ability to see.
<input type="checkbox"/> Furniture that you have to walk around when you walk through a room	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask someone to move the furniture so the walking path through a room is clear.
<input type="checkbox"/> Must walk over or around cords or wires from stereos, TVs, lamps, or phones	<input type="checkbox"/> Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall to prevent tripping. <input type="checkbox"/> Have an electrician add an outlet if necessary.
<input type="checkbox"/> Poor or burned out light in a room or in the stairway	<input type="checkbox"/> Replace a light bulb or have a friend or family member replace the light bulb if it is in the stairwell or a hard to reach place.
<input type="checkbox"/> Only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or only at the bottom)	<input type="checkbox"/> Have an electrician add an overhead light at the top AND bottom of the stairs where overhead lighting is lacking.
<input type="checkbox"/> You walk into a dark room to turn on a light	<input type="checkbox"/> Turn on lights prior to walking in a room or accessing a stairwell.

## Floors, Stairs, and Lighting

### Hazards

### Corrections

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor outdoor lighting    | <input type="checkbox"/> Be sure indoor and outdoor walkways are properly lit, especially at night.  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not take short-cuts from outdoor paths; stay on paved paths.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor indoor lighting     | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce glare in a room by using fluorescent lights and lamp shades. Window shades will also help to reduce glare from windows and doors.  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Add bright strips or a contrasting color of tape or paint to the edge of each stair to help you see the step better and to indicate the edge of the step where you do NOT want to step. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Add nightlights to bathrooms and hallways to make trips to the bathroom safer but not disturbing to your eyes.  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a flashlight in your nightstand for emergencies.   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Add light to dark places. It is safest to have uniform lighting throughout a room.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slippery or shiny floors | <input type="checkbox"/> Use non-skid wax, or no wax at all, on polished floors.   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean up spills on floors immediately.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Throw rugs on the floor  | <input type="checkbox"/> Remove throw rugs or use double-sided rug tape or non-slip backings to prevent rugs from slipping.  |

## Kitchen

### Hazards

### Corrections

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Items located on shelves that are too high/out of reach? | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep things you use most often in lower shelves or shelves within easy reach between hip and eye level.                      |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use long-handled reachers to grasp objects that are on high shelves or on the floor.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use an unsteady stepstool                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't use a stool. Ask for help! If you must use a stool, get a new, steady step stool that has a bar on which you can hold. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Never use a chair or stool as a step stool.  |

## Bedrooms

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard to reach the light near your bed | <input type="checkbox"/> Move lamp closer to the bed and within reach when you are reclining. |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a flashlight in your nightstand for emergencies.                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dark path from the bed to bathroom    | <input type="checkbox"/> Use nightlights to help you see where you are walking.               |

## Bathrooms

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slippery tub or shower floor   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use non-slip rubber mats or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub and/or shower.   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Consider using a shower chair and use a hand-held shower head so you can safely sit and bathe.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No support when you get in/out of tub or shower or up/down from the toilet | <input type="checkbox"/> Hire a carpenter to properly mount grab bars next to and inside the tub/shower and next to the toilet. (You can also install grab rails that fasten onto the back of the toilet seat.)                   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid pulling up on the sink or holding on to towel racks to get up from the toilet or bathtub. These fixtures are not securely fastened to the wall and are not meant to support weight.                |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> If you cannot easily get on/off the toilet, you may have to adjust the height of the toilet in addition to installing grab bars. Toilets can be inexpensively raised by installing a raised toilet seat. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> If you cannot safely get in/out of the shower or bath or on/off the toilet by yourself, ask for assistance.  |

## Miscellaneous

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Furniture that is difficult to get in/out of | <input type="checkbox"/> Use chairs with firm arm rests to help make getting up and down easier.     |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use furniture with good back support.                                       |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Add pillows to the backs of chair to ensure that your feet touch the floor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inaccessible telephone                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a cordless telephone.   |