

# Fall Prevention

## *Did you know...*

- 60 percent of fatal falls involve older Americans in the home.
- An estimated one-third of all Americans over the age of 65 will experience a fall each year.
- Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to the emergency department in the United States.
- Fractures are the most serious injury associated with falls, accounting for 87 percent of all fractures for people over the age of 65.
- As you age, your bones become more porous, weaker and more vulnerable to fractures.
- Falls rank among the top five causes of death from unintentional injuries in the United States and are the second leading cause of spinal cord and brain injury in the older population.
- One-third to one-half of all accidents and falls in the home can be prevented with home maintenance and alterations.

Fall prevention is in your hands! Taking the right steps to avoid these serious complications is easier than you may think. Use the information provided in this pamphlet to help assess the conditions of your home and current lifestyle to make your environment a safer place to live in.

## *What You Can Do To Prevent Falls...*

As with any problem, talk to your doctor thoroughly about any questions or concerns you may have regarding falls. An individual assessment can help identify any physical factors that may put you at greater risk for a fall.

*Don't let the fear of falling stop you from living your life to the fullest! It is up to you to change your lifestyle in the appropriate way. Stay active, live in a safe environment and stay educated.*

If you have fallen already, a thorough medical assessment is important to identify the underlying health problems that contributed to your fall and may lead to further falls in the future.

**BEGIN A REGULAR EXERCISE PROGRAM.** Exercise makes you stronger and helps you feel better. As you age, your body becomes weaker and your bones may change shape; this affects balance, mobility and reaction time. Exercises to improve balance and coordination are most helpful. Ask your doctor about the best kind of exercise program for you.

**HAVE YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER** review your medicines. As you get older, the way your body reacts with certain medications can change. Some medicines or combinations can make you feel dizzy or sleepy, which can cause you to fall. Be sure to take into account all the over-the-counter medications you are taking as well.

**HAVE YOUR VISION CHECKED** at least once a year. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition that could limit your vision.



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## *Make Your Home Safer:*

- Put handrails on stairways and grab bars in bathrooms.
- Use non-skid rugs.
- Keep floors clean of clutter and loose cords. Remove all the things you could trip over.
- Rearrange the furniture so there are cleared pathways.
- If you need to reach something, use stepstools not chairs.
- Keep items used most often in cabinets you can reach without a stool.
- Limit your alcohol intake.

**WEAR SHOES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.** Wear rubber soles or footwear that will not be slippery when you walk. Thin-soled shoes are better than those with thick soles. Avoid socks or bare feet. Use caution when walking on uneven or wet surfaces.

**IMPROVE THE LIGHTING IN YOUR HOME.** Use night-lights and lamps you can easily reach. Put light switches at both the top and bottom of stairways. It is common for falls to occur at night when it is hardest to see your surroundings.

**GET UP SLOWLY AFTER YOU SIT OR LIE DOWN.** Think about wearing an alarm device you can activate if you fall. Getting help quickly can help save your life.

## *Safe Steps Checklist*

A safer home is in your hands.

- When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?
- Do you have throw rugs on the floor?
- Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords?

- Is there clutter on the floor or stairs?
- Are you missing a light over the stairway?
- Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?
- Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or bottom)?
- Are the handrails on your stairs or in your shower loose or broken?
- Are the things you use on high shelves?
- Is the tub or shower floor slippery?
- Is the light near the bed hard to reach?
- Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?
- Do you have any vision problems?
- Do you have any other questions to be answered? If so address these with your doctor at your next visit.

If you were able to answer yes to any of these questions, act now and take the appropriate steps forward to correct these issues. Ask family members and friends to help. A safer home is in your hands!

Many of the simple changes that can be made in your home can also be just as simply overlooked. Many people who have had a fall are scared to experience one again. They change their lifestyle, becoming less active and less involved in their normal activities. These individuals may experience a decreased quality of life and feel limited by their age.

Don't let the fear of falling stop you from living your life to the fullest! It is up to you to change your lifestyle in the appropriate way. Stay active, live in a safe environment and stay educated.

