

Fall Prevention

- Each year, thousands of older Americans fall at home.
- Many of them are seriously injured, and some are disabled.
- In 2002, more than 12,800 people over age 65 died and 1.6 million were treated in emergency departments because of falls.
- Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but easy to fix.

Indoor Safety

Look at the floor in each room

1. Make sure there is no furniture or other objects (i.e. books, papers, shoes, boxes) in your path as you walk through each room.
2. Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
3. Coil or tape cords and wires (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords) next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.

Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home

1. Always keep stairs clear of objects (i.e. papers, shoes, books).
2. Have loose or uneven steps repaired.
3. Make sure you have adequate lighting and light switches. Have an electrician put in an overhead light and a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs if needed. You can get light switches that glow.
4. Make sure light bulbs are replaced when burned out.
5. Make sure carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.
6. Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.

Look at your kitchen and eating area

1. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).
2. If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.

Look at all your bathrooms

1. Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
2. Have a carpenter put grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.

Look at all your bedrooms

1. Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.
2. Make sure the path from your bed to the bathroom is not dark. Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

Outdoor Safety

- Wear low-heeled shoes with rubber soles for more solid footing (traction), and wear warm boots in winter.
- Use hand rails as you go up and down steps and on escalators.
- If sidewalks look slippery, walk in the grass for more solid footing.
- In winter, carry a small bag of rock salt or kosher salt in your pocket or car. You can then sprinkle the salt or kitty litter on sidewalks or streets that are slippery.
- Look carefully at floor surfaces in public buildings. Floors made of highly polished marble or tile can be very slippery. When these surfaces are wet, they may become dangerous. When floors have plastic or carpet runners in place, stay on them whenever possible.
- Keep your porch, deck, walkways and driveway free of leaves, snow, trash or clutter. Also keep them in good repair. Cover porch steps with a gritty, weather-proof paint and install handrails on both sides.
- Turn on the light outside your front door before leaving your home in the early evening so that you have outdoor light when you return after dark.
- Use a shoulder bag, fanny pack or a backpack purse to leave your hands free.
- Use a walker or cane as needed.
- Find out about community services that can provide help, such as 24-hour pharmacies and grocery stores that take orders by phone or internet and deliver, especially in poor weather.
- Stop at curbs and check the height before stepping up or down. Be careful at curbs that have been cut away to allow access for bikes or wheelchairs. The incline may lead to a fall.
- Consider wearing hip protectors or hip pads for added protection should you fall.

Other Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

- Exercise regularly. Exercise makes you stronger and improves your balance and coordination.
- Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy.
- Have your vision checked at least once a year by an eye doctor. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling.
- Get up slowly after you sit or lie down.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Improve the lighting in your home. Put in brighter light bulbs. Florescent bulbs are bright and cost less to use.
- It's safest to have uniform lighting in a room. Add lighting to dark areas. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Paint a contrasting color on the top edge of all steps so you can see the stairs better. For example, use a light color paint on dark wood.

Other Safety Tips

- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall and can't get up