



## Avoiding Slips, Trips and Spills in the Home

Maybe you were trying to maneuver with one too many grocery bags and caught your foot on the hall rug. Maybe your 10-year-old was tearing down the stairs again. Whatever the circumstances, we've all done it: tripped and fallen during routine tasks around the home.

Most of the time we walk away with only bruises but we might not always be so lucky. What can you do? One thing is to examine your fall risks at home the same way you would on the job. Whether it's you, your kids or an older relative, an ounce of prevention really is the answer when the question deals with falls.

"A few adjustments in your home can make the difference between being safe and being at risk of falling," said Barb Caracci, director of product development, emergency care programs, for the National Safety Council.

Two simple changes Caracci suggested are installing handrails on stairways or grab bars in the bathroom.

Here are some additional tips on how to prevent falls in your home.

### Baby Steps

One of the thrills of parenthood is watching a child take those first wobbly steps. However, that milestone of development also signals parents to become more diligent. As toddlers grow and explore, they don't think about the dangers involved, including falls.

Parents and caregivers should pay particular attention to the following areas of the home:

- **Windows.** Unguarded windows opened only 5 inches pose a danger to children younger than 10. Keep windows closed and locked when children are around. Insect screens are good for one purpose – keeping insects out. Never depend on an insect screen to keep a child from falling through a window.
- **Bath.** Bathtubs can be slippery places for kids. Use a rubber mat or slip-resistant stickers on the floor of the tub.
- **Stairs.** Keep stairs clear. If infants or toddlers are in the home, install safety gates.
- **Floors.** Secure area rugs, especially on wood, ceramic, tile or linoleum floors. Secure with a piece of foam carpet backing, double-sided tape or a rubber pad.

### Focus on Seniors

The older we get the more susceptible we become to serious injury when we fall.

According to the National Safety Council's "Injury Facts," falls are the second-leading cause of unintentional injury death for people 59 to 77 years old, and the leading cause for those 78 and older. Some 54 percent of these fatal falls occur at home. To help yourself or someone you know, consider:

- **Proper footwear.** Wearing athletic shoes around the house can reduce the risk of falls.
- **Medication.** Studies show older adults taking more than four medications are at high risk for falls due to diminished alertness and slower reactions.
- **Exercise.** The stronger the body, the less likely the person is to sustain a fall. According to the



National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, exercises that improve balance and coordination are the most helpful in reducing an older adult's chances of a fall.

- **Medical checkups.** Schedule annual physicals. Blood pressure problems, bladder and bowel problems, problems with gait and balance, and multiple chronic conditions all factor into senior falls, according to British Columbia's Ministry of Health Services. Poor vision, the wrong eyeglass prescription, or a condition such as glaucoma or cataracts also can increase the chance of a fall, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

### **Falls Don't Discriminate**

Everyone is vulnerable to falls. Many of the preventative measures we take at work apply across the board, no matter what your age:

- Keep floors clear and clean. Reduce clutter, and tuck telephone and electrical cords out of walk ways. Do not wax floors.
- Install handrails in stairways. Also, check that treads and rugs on steps are secure.
- Keep living areas well lit, and place night lights in bathrooms.
- Be aware that climbing and reaching high places will increase your risk of a fall. Use a sturdy step stool with handrails when these tasks are necessary. Store frequently used items in easy-to-reach areas.

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