

10 Ways to Prevent Falls

A senior citizen is treated for a fall every 15 seconds in the nation's emergency rooms, according to a report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The same report says an elderly person dies every 29 minutes from a fall or complications from falls. Although falls are the leading cause of injury among senior citizens, they are preventable.

Here are 10 ways to prevent falls at home:

1. Remove Clutter

Widen the walkways by removing excess books, papers, clothes and shoes, etc. If there is furniture that is difficult for your loved one to maneuver around, push it to the side of the room to allow room to walk. Rugs should be secured or removed as they are tripping hazards.

2. Install Grab Bars and Handrails

If your loved one's stairs do not have handrails, take the time to install them. Even if it is just a few steps, handrails will help older folks steady themselves. In the bathroom, grab bars near the toilet and in the shower or bath will make your loved one feel more confident using the bathroom, even if he or she has an assistant.

3. Improve Lighting

As we age, we need more light to see clearly. Take the time to replace light bulbs around the home. If there are many dark areas, replacing old fixtures with adjustable track lighting may help.

4. Raise Seating

The taller elderly may find sitting and getting up easier if their chairs are raised. Cushions can be used to raise most living room and dining room seats. Toilet seats should be securely raised by installing a fixed or adjustable seat that provides a more comfortable toilet sitting height.

5. Wear Sensible Shoes

To increase traction on all surfaces, make sure your loved one is wearing the right shoes throughout the day. For example, wearing sox or slippers on a vinyl floor is dangerous. Your loved one should wear well-fitting, nonskid shoes both inside and outside the home. Remember to replace shoes when they become worn-out.

6. Keep Items in Lower Cabinets

To prevent your loved one from losing his or her balance, keep regularly used items in cabinets that are easy to reach. This prevents your loved one from over-exertion and seeking a step stool.

7. Inspect Eye Wear

Check that your loved one's glasses are the correct prescription every year. The wrong lens prescription makes it harder to see objects in the way and may also cause dizziness. If glasses are the correct prescription, regularly check to see that they are clean and fitting properly.

8. Monitor Medications

If your loved one is taking several medications, pay attention to the side effects. Some medications — or combinations thereof — may cause your loved one to feel drowsy or dizzy, which can lead to a fall. Check with your loved one's doctor to see if medications can be switched to avoid side effects.

9. Use Mobility Aids Properly

Canes and walkers are great at helping your loved one maintain his or her balance. However, if used incorrectly, these devices can cause a fall. Let your loved one choose the cane or walker that fits, feels right, and meets his or her design needs. Your loved one should visit a physical therapist with a new cane to ensure it is used correctly.

10. Stay Active

Help your elderly loved ones exercise and remain active. Weak legs lead to poor balance, which ultimately can lead to a fall. Walking, swimming, climbing stairs, dancing, bicycling and gardening are great ways for your loved one to maintain an active lifestyle.