

FALL PREVENTION & SAFETY INFORMATION

Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths and the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma. According to the **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** (CDC), in 2000 1.6 million seniors were treated in emergency departments for fall-related injuries and 353,000 were hospitalized. The chance that a fall will cause a severe injury requiring hospitalization greatly increases with age.

According to data from the National Safety Council (NSC), each week more than 30,000 people over the age of 65 are seriously injured in a fall, with nearly 250 dying from their injuries. Of those who do survive a fall, 20-30 percent suffer from debilitating injuries that affect them the rest of their life. In addition:

- Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death for both males and females 75+.
- In 2001, more than 11,500 people over age 65 died of falls.
- The most common serious injury is a hip fracture. More than 24 percent of all people suffering a hip fracture die within a year of the fall and another 50 percent never return to their prior level of mobility and independence.
- A total of 54 percent of all elderly fall-related deaths occur in the home, and 20 percent take place in residential institutions.
- A study published in the June issue of *Osteoporosis International* ...shows that 30 percent of elderly men who break their hip will die within a year of the accident - twice the death risk of women.

Typical scenarios for falls included:

- Falls down stairs (while descending or ascending)
- Transitioning from standing to sitting (and vice versa) on furniture, toilets, beds, bathtubs, etc.
- Falls from tripping over loose carpets, cords, and other obstacles on the floor.
- Falling off ladders and step stools.

However, falls are not just the result of getting older and many falls can be prevented. Small modifications of lifestyle or the home environment can reduce the chances of falling:

1. Begin a regular exercise program. Exercise, especially for the lower part of the body, is one of the most important ways to reduce the chances of falling. It makes you stronger and helps you feel better. Exercises that improve balance and coordination (like Tai Chi) are the most helpful. Ask a doctor or health care worker about the best type of fall-prevention exercise program for your personal needs and capacities.
2. Make your home safer. About half of all falls happen at home. Here are eight precautions you can take to make the home safer:
 - a. Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
 - b. Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
 - c. Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
 - d. Have grab bars put in next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
 - e. Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
 - f. Improve the lighting in your home. As people get older they need brighter lights to see well. Lamp shades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare.
 - g. Have handrails and lights put in on all staircases.
 - h. Wear shoes that give good support and have thin non-slip soles. Avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads.

3. Have a health care provider review your medicines. Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take (including ones that don't need prescriptions such as cold medicines). As you get older, the way some medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can lead to drowsiness or light-headedness which can lead to a fall.
4. Have your vision checked. Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition such as glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision. Poor vision can increase the chances of falling.

For more information on Safety and Fall Prevention, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/ or the United States Department of Health & Human Services www.hhs.gov/.