

Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips



Preventing accidental falls in and around the home - information for friends, neighbours, relatives and carers of older people



Accidents in the home are more frequent and more distressing, both physically and mentally, the older we get.

Falls, slips and trips are the most common type of accident in the home. The statistics are alarming: every five hours one older person is killed by an accidental fall in the home. Thousands are seriously injured every year—for many this leads to a long term reduction in their quality of life, making them more reliant on others. In fact one in five people who suffers a hip fracture dies within six months.

People are more at risk of falls if they do not take regular physical activity, have a poor diet, have poor health or have a cluttered, cold or badly lit home. Even minor falls can lead to a fear of falling again and a tendency towards reducing physical activity, which itself then makes an older person more prone to falling.

If certain precautions are taken, however, most accidental falls that occur in the home can be prevented. Carers, friends, neighbours and family are ideally placed to help an older person with these changes, to their home environment and lifestyle.



So how can you help?

Do you know someone who may be at risk?



If you can answer 'yes' to any of the following questions then the person you know or care for is at risk:

- Did they fall, or trip often, in the last year?
- Do they stop walking when you or they talk?
- Do they tend to get light-headed or dizzy when they are standing or turning?
- Are they having difficulty walking or rising from a low chair?
- Do they have poor balance (need a stick or walker or tend to hold onto objects as they walk) or show lack of control when moving from one type of floor surface to another?
- Do they take more than four medications daily?
- Do they have trouble sleeping or suffer from depression?
- Do they tend to turn their heating off as a means of saving money?
- Is their home or environment cluttered or badly lit?

What can you do?

It is helpful to raise awareness of



- the need for regular physical activity
- dangers and risks in the home
- the need to inform their GP and you, of changes in health, fall-related injuries and any side-effects of medications
- the need to have regular eye and foot-care check-ups.

and to help them

- make safety changes to their home
(see home environment issues below for examples)
- contact relevant services such as your local authority or charities that can give advice, financial or practical help
(see back of leaflet)
- develop coping skills by increasing their confidence and reducing the fear/anxiety of falling
- become more mobile
(by walking with them and motivating them to keep up regular activity)



and finally

- a person's recovery from a fall is poor if they lie on the floor for more than 12 hours, so try to keep in regular contact
- try to stay active yourself. You will have more strength and energy, be more able to help them if they have fallen and be more inclined to motivate them to stay active.



Home environment issues

Consider discussing the following safety changes:



- fitting a letterbox cage can help them to avoid stooping to pick up letters
- using 100W light bulbs in the kitchen and stairways will make it easier to see any hazards
- try buying long-life bulbs so they don't have to be changed so often
- highlighting the outer edge of steps with non-slip white paint will make them more visible
- try to avoid having trailing wires and clutter in walking areas and on stairs
- using non-slip mats under rugs, in the kitchen, inside and next to the bath and on stair landings will help to avoid any trips
- handrails by the toilet, bath and stairs will aid balance and can make getting around easier





- removing or repairing frayed carpet edges will make them safer and will reduce the risk of somebody tripping over them
 - think about storing frequently used items in areas that are easily accessible. This avoids the need to stretch or stoop
 - advise them to seek help for chores such as changing curtains or light bulbs
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- using a sturdy set of non-slip steps with a safety chain and handrail is safer than standing on a chair
 - removing casters from easily moveable furniture can make them more stable so they can be leant against, or held onto to aid balance
 - spreading salty sand on wet or icy steps will make them less slippery
 - mopping up spills immediately will reduce the risk of slipping for them and any visitors



Remind them to turn on the lights if they need to use the toilet at night and to get up slowly and carefully to avoid dizziness. Dizziness on standing or sitting from the lying position is common and can be reduced by moving slowly and in stages and by tensing the arm and leg muscles a few times between each stage.

Encourage them to have regular eye and foot-care check-ups.

People are disinclined to bother their GP with minor injuries but often falls can be prevented by changes to medication or simple advice that the GP can give.

Bone scans and hip protector underwear can also be arranged by the GP.

If the person you are caring for has dementia they are less likely to look after their own safety. Some carers respond to this by trying to supervise and control the movement of the person they are caring for. This can lead to a reduction in their freedom of movement and independence and increase the risk of a fall. A safe home environment will help the person with dementia live as normal a life as possible.



What to do if somebody has a fall and can't get up

- do not move them
 - keep them warm
 - summon help – phone for an ambulance or call their GP.
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What other help is available?

Age Concern, Help the Aged and Care and Repair schemes within local authorities offer advice on fall prevention, welfare rights and benefits, free home safety and security checks and can often fund equipment that aids safety.

Home exercise books or videos can be obtained from Research Into Ageing and good bookshops. The YMCA and Extend train teachers in safe exercise for older people.

