

## **Fall Prevention Tips and Information**

Falls are the main source of injury for seniors in the home and away. Over 10,000 elderly people die every year. Falls can be prevented by changing our activities, physical condition and removing the risks and hazards in and around the home or when away from home.

Over a third of the falls by elderly occurs in the home. Two thirds of the elderly who fall will fall again.

About half the seniors who fall and break a hip develop serious complications within two years and many of them are fatal.

### **Exercise to Prevent Falls**

Seniors can avoid fall related injuries by increasing strength and balance, ensuring that medications are appropriate and that eyeglasses are correct.

Exercise is one of the most important ways to reduce the chance of falling. Physical problems, such as muscle weakness in the legs and back and feet cause falls. Exercise not only makes you physically stronger but also improves your feelings about yourself and your abilities. Exercise increases your mobility and balance. Always check with your doctor about an exercise program.

- Walking is one of the best ways to improve your physical well being. Start out with a short distances and increase the length of time you walk and the speed at which you walk. It is best to walk with a partner.
- Avoid using athletic shoes with deep treads because they cause trips. Wear shoes that give good support and have non-slip soles.
- A simple balance exercise is to hold onto another person so that they can help support you, stand on one foot and lift the other a number of times. Then change to the other foot. Eventually a person should be able to do the exercise by holding on to an object and then without holding on for support.
- In addition to exercise bicycles there are exercise devices with pedals for the feet designed for a person to use while sitting in a chair. This device can also be used by grabbing the pedals and exercising the arms.
- A regular exercise of light weights helps with strength and balance. A better method for exercising with weights is by doing the repetitions very slowly. This increases the effectiveness of the exercise. Slow lift of a weight will equal five to seven faster lifts.

## **Medications**

Have your health care provider review all your medications including those bought over the counter and herbal medications to be sure that they or the combination of the appropriate footwear is not causing muscle weakness or balance problems or other side effects.

## **Vision Correction**

Have your vision checked to be sure that the glasses are not causing a problem. Bifocals can cause a problem when walking on stairs or walking on changing floor levels like a doorsill, curb or uneven ground.

## **Hazards around the Home Lead to fall**

In addition seniors can reduce the risk of falling by changing the hazardous conditions at home and being alert to hazards away from home.

Prevent falls in the home by identifying possible problems that may lead to falling.

- At the sidewalk in the front of the house be sure that the sidewalk is clean of pebbles and debris. During the fall, wet leaves are a slipping hazard. Of course during the winter have someone keep the sidewalk and stairs clear of ice and snow. On icy or a slippery surface walk like a penguin by taking short steps with toes pointed outward to aid in keeping balance. Wear winter footwear.
- The steps should have nonskid treading and the flooring of the porch and steps should be painted with non-skid paint containing a gritty substance. The steps must have railings and must be used going up or down. Bright lighting will aid in safe travel up the stairs into the home.
- It helps if the doorsill is of contrasting color.
- Inside the front entrance avoid using throw rugs but if there are any they should be secured with double sided tape or fastened to prevent the rug from sliding or lifting. Rugs and carpet edges should be secured by nonskid taping where appropriate.
- The traffic pattern in the rooms should provide a clear path of travel without having to maneuver around coffee tables or footstools.
- Remove items that are a tripping hazard like papers, books, clothes or pillows.
- Electrical extension cords can be a tripping and fire hazard. If they must be used temporarily put them along the wall. However, do not put them under a rug because heat can be generated causing a fire. Do not coil extension cords that are too long because the electricity flowing through coiled wiring generates heat. Move appliances closer to an outlet to eliminate the need for an extension cord. If

an extension cord is needed continuously it is best to hire an electrician to install another outlet.

- Improve the lighting in your home. Elderly need brighter lights to see well as we age. If brighter lights cause a glare use frosted bulbs. Use night-lights or motion sensitive lights to avoid walking around in the dark or turn lights on. Bright lighting on stairs is essential.
- Unsafe actions and conditions on stairs are a source of falls. All stairs need railings and railings on both sides are best. Do not put items on the stair landing or steps to carry later.
- Do not carry items that are so large that they prevent seeing where to step.
- Carpeting on stairs eventually works loose. The loose carpeting will shift underfoot so it must be examined periodically and reattached.
- Avoid using floppy slippers when walking on the stairs.
- Use nonskid applications or mats and or seats in the bathtub or shower. Use nonskid mats outside the shower or tub. Install grab bars next to the tub, shower and toilet.
- Clean up spills to avoid slipping in the kitchen and bath especially.

#### **Use Ladders Safely to Prevent Falls**

- Place items that are used most often in the lower cabinets or shelves to avoid the need to use a step stool or ladder.
- Do not use a chair in place of a ladder or stool.
- If necessary to obtain items from a high place use a step stool that is designed with a support bar to hold for balance. The support bar should be tall enough to touch without bending over.
- If it is necessary to use a step stool or ladder place it so as not to stretch and over reach which could cause one to lose balance and fall. It is better to get down and relocate the ladder to make an easier climb.
- Do not take too much so that both hands are occupied which could cause loss of balance when descending.
- Do not reach so far that the hips go outside the sides of an extension ladder. Do not carry too much up or down a ladder. Always maintain three points of contact with one hand and two feet or one foot and two hands. Do not go near electrical wires with an aluminum ladder because it conducts electricity. Use wood or fiberglass ladders when working around electricity.

Many falls occur outside during garden work. Elderly trip over Hoses, garden tools, flowerpots, branches and various outdoor items are tripping hazards for the elderly.

### **Falls While Shopping**

- When going out to eat or shop watch for the mats that businesses place at the entrance for correcting wet walkways and floors because the edges curl and cause a tripping hazard.
- Escalators are a source of falls because the elderly fail to time the moving steps properly. Always use the handrails on escalators.
- Do not rest the packages on the hand rails. People fall while trying to retrieve packages that fall off the handrails.
- Do not lean against the sides of the escalator because the friction and weight of the person slows the body in relation to the moving stairs and causes the person to fall.
- Improper shoes, undone laces, carrying too many packages and hurrying lead to falls on escalators.
- Elderly also take steps on escalators going up or down and miss-time their steps resulting in a fall.
- When entering and exiting an elevator watch to be sure that the elevator has stopped level with the floor.

### **Shoes lead to falls.**

- Often elderly women want to wear more fashionable shoes with slim heels or higher heels which often results in loss of balance because the ankle and leg muscles are weaker.
- Men like the shoes they have worn a long time because they are comfortable. Men and women for that matter drag their feet and the bottom of the heels wear unevenly. When the elderly step on a crack in the sidewalk or any uneven surface the worn heel causes a turned ankle and a fall.
- Older shoes have worn off the non skid material or grooves and develop a slick sole and heel. As a result during wet weather seniors will slip and fall.

The number one fall prevention activity is exercise. Exercise supported by a senior's sense of safe behavior and proper attire will prevent falls and aid in an enjoyable seniors life.