

PREVENT FALLS

HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

Falls are the second leading cause of accidental death in the U.S. and Canada. What can you do to avoid falls? Conduct this checklist with your family to identify ways to prevent falls or decrease the severity of a fall-related injury.

Steps and Stairs

- Assure adequate lighting on all stairways, with switches at the bottom and top of stairs.
- Install sturdy handrails on both sides of all flights of stairs, and use them every time.
- Remove all objects from stairways.
- Provide good footing on inside and outside stairways. Securely fasten all treads, risers and carpeting. Install anti-slip paint or tape.
- Remove snow and ice promptly from outside stairways.
- Install safety gates at the top and bottom of stairways if you have young children.
- Don't climb over child safety gates. Take the time to open the gate and secure it properly behind you.

Bedroom

- Install night lights in all sleeping areas, hallways and bathrooms.
- Install guardrails on bunk beds and beds where young children sleep.
- Keep dresser drawers closed.
- Pause at the edge of the bed for a moment before getting up to avoid dizziness.

Bathroom

- Make shower and bathtub floors skid-resistant with rubber matting or adhesive appliques.
- Place nonskid bath rugs outside each shower/tub.
- Install grab bars when an older family member begins to have trouble moving about safely. Fasten with long screws anchored into wall studs.
- Be sure shower stalls have code-standard shatterproof glass.

Kitchen

- Keep a sturdy step-stool handy for hard-to-reach items.
- Arrange cabinets so that frequently used items (non-poisonous) are easy to reach.
- Clean up spills and wet spots immediately.
- Keep cabinets and drawers closed.
- Do not leave children unattended, and teach them not to climb on counters and shelves.

E.R. FACTS TO FALL FOR

Accidental falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to hospital emergency rooms, accounting for over 6.3 million visits each year. Over 1 million of those yearly E.R. visits are attributed to falls on steps and stairs.

Source: U.S. National Safety Council Accident Facts, 2000 Edition

Personal Action

Although your physical surroundings are part of the picture, there's more to fall safety than home repairs. Review and discuss your family's lifestyle and other behaviors that can contribute to injuries.

- To reduce the severity of a fall injury, maintain a regular program of exercise. Include aerobic activity, stretching and weight training to improve strength and muscle tone, and keep your joints, tendons and ligaments flexible. (Consult your physician before starting an exercise program and/or if you have or are at risk for a chronic health condition (e.g. diabetes, hypertension.)
- Know if your medications may cause dizziness. Contact your pharmacist or physician to discuss side effects.
- Include three to four calcium-rich foods in your daily diet for stronger bones, such as:
 - Low-fat dairy products like milk, yogurt or cheese
 - Dark green leafy vegetables like collard or mustard greens
 - Calcium-fortified juices or cereals
 - Tofu prepared with calcium sulfate or calcium lactate

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Living Rooms and All Areas

- Pay attention to your surroundings and be able to see where you're going, especially on stairs. Never carry a load that blocks your vision.
- Practice good housekeeping. Pick up objects from floors and wipe up spills
- Recognize that area or throw rugs increase tripping hazards. Use them only if they have a slip-resistant backing, and keep them away from the top and bottom of stairs.
- Arrange furniture to allow for ample walkways.
- Replace or repair frayed or torn carpeting.
- Always use a step stool or ladder, never a counter, shelf or chair.
- Keep electrical and phone cords out of walkways.
- Don't walk on freshly washed or waxed floors.

Windows

- Don't sit or stand on windowsills.
- Place beds and other furniture away from windows.
- Install window guards in rooms where small children may be left unattended. (Guards must be removable in case of an emergency.)

Garage and Workshops

- Keep walkways free of clutter and obstacles.
- Wipe up grease, oil and other substances immediately.
- Install light switches at all entrances.

Outdoors

- Repair cracks and uneven surfaces in walkways.
- Ensure that driveway, walkways and entrances are well lit. Install motion-detecting lights if constant illumination is bothersome.
- Install railings on porches, balconies and structural elevations.
- Install grates or covers over window wells.
- Keep yard free of tools, toys, tree branches and other debris.

Ladders

- Store ladders away from heat sources and minimize exposure to the elements.
- Check weight capacities of ladders before using. Consider body weight and the weight of tools and materials.
- Learn and practice proper ladder techniques. Obtain a free home ladder safety kit by returning the form at the bottom of this page.
- Inspect the condition of all ladders. Check for:
 - Splits or cracks on side rails.
 - Loose rungs, steps, rails, braces or hardware.
 - Sound connection points.
 - Rough burrs or sharp edges on metal ladders.
 - Deterioration of fiberglass ladders.
 - Frayed rope on extension ladders.
- If any part of the ladder looks faulty, don't use it. Repair, rent, borrow or buy a new one.
- Do not try to repair ladders with major structural damage. Dismantle and discard.

RESOURCES

Contact the following organizations for more information about preventing falls:

- National Safety Council, 1-800-621-7619, www.nsc.org
- National Osteoporosis Foundation, 1-202-223-2226, <http://www.nof.org/Osteoporosis.html>
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 1-800-638-2772, www.cpsc.gov

