

SOME FACTS ABOUT FALLS

- More people suffer serious injuries from falling than from any other cause. Men are more likely to die from a fall, but elderly females are the most frequent people to fall.
- 1 in 3 adults aged 65 and older falls each year
- For every hospitalization for a traffic injury, there are 10 hospitalizations for falls.
- 1 in 5 hip fracture patients die within a year of their injury.
- About half of all falls happen in the home. **Don't wait to change things in the house until after you have had a fall.**
- A report by the Department of Veterans Affairs in Canada says "serious fall injuries have become a public health problem that could reach crisis proportions"
- The US National Safety Council says that 13,000 people over 65 will die in the US of a fall every year.
- It also say, "**Most of us accept falling as a by product of aging. It is not. Many of these falls are preventable.**"

HOW TO PREVENT FALLS (from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control)

Many falls can be prevented. Falls are usually caused by a number of things. By changing some of these things, you can lower your chances of falling.

1. Begin a regular exercise program (but talk to your doctor first)

- Exercise is one of the most important ways to reduce your 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.
- Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling.
- Ask your doctor about the best type of exercise program for you.

2. Make your home safer

You think of your house as your safe place, your haven, but it is full of lurking dangers ready to trip you.

- Remove things you can trip over (such as electrical cords, papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Watch that telephone cord. Remove any cords that cross the areas where you walk.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep rugs from slipping, and remove any that still aren't stable underfoot.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool. Beware of falling objects.
- Store heavy items at waist level for easier handling. If you have trouble lifting things, a small kitchen cart will make transferring dishes to the table or dining room easier and safer.

- Keep a step stool handy -- and never use an impromptu substitute, like a box or bucket.
- Accident-proof your bathroom. Because it's often soapy, slippery, and wet, the bathroom is one of the most dangerous rooms in your home. Line your bathtub or shower with a non-slip rubber mat or abrasive strips, and consider installing one or more grab bars next to the toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Never use a towel rack to steady yourself: it can fall off the wall and take you with it.
- Improve the lighting in your home especially important in areas like stairs and basements, where there may be uneven footing.
- As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Lamp shades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare.
- Always keep a night-light on at night, or better yet, have a lamp near your bed so you can turn on the light before getting up.
- Have handrails and lights put in on all staircases. Install light switches at each end of the stairs.
- In the home wear shoes that give good support and have thin non-slip soles. Avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads.
- Take care getting up from a bed or chair. You may feel faint or dizzy for a short time. This is often the cause of a fall.
- Last but not least: make sure passageways and rooms stay neat and uncluttered, clean up any spills immediately, and wear well-fitting, comfortable shoes.

3. Safety walking on the street

- Some studies say that walking on cobbles makes your ankles stronger.
- The best thing is to wear comfortable, sturdy shoes.
- Look where you are walking especially on uneven surfaces and slopes.

4. Have your doctor review your medicines

Have your doctor look at all the medicines you take (including over the counter medicines, including cold medicine). As you get older, the way some medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you drowsy or light-headed which can lead to a fall.

5. Have your vision checked

Have your eyes checked regularly 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 your chances of falling. Don't walk around with your reading glasses on – you may miss that step.

THOSE MOST AT RISK OF FALLING HAVE:

- Gait or balance problems
- Dementia
- Parkinson's disease or a history of a stroke
- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis

- Old sports injuries
- Weakness or nerve disorders in legs
- Impaired vision
- Certain medications that you may be taking

AN EASY WAY TO CHECK TO SEE IF YOU ARE AT RISK:

The 'GET UP AND GO TEST' - to see if your leg muscles are weakened enough to worry about a fall

Sit in a hard, straight-backed chair. Fold your arms across your chest. Try to stand. If you can't on the first try, tell a doctor so you can be checked for possible problems.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FALL

1. IF YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN AND YOU FALL

- If you can, you need to get up by yourself
- If you can, roll over to a chair or steady furniture and use it to help you get back up

2. IF SOMEONE YOU ARE WITH FALLS

- Check they are safe – away from further accident
- Let them try to get up – get a chair to help have something to climb up
- Your help might be the worst thing - it can be dangerous to help someone up – they might compound a fractured leg by standing on it.
- Check they are not confused (they might have a concussion)
- If they cannot get up, then call the Red Cross or their doctor

CONCLUSION

- Be aware of your surroundings. Pay attention. Hold on to things.
- Wear shoes with support
- Have a buddy system with a friend and check on each other every day
- **BE SURE TO GET YOUR BONE DENSITY TESTS DONE AND CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR ON MEASURES TO PREVENT BONE LOSS**
- **FALLS ARE NOT SOMETHING TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. YOU CAN LOSE YOUR INDEPENDENCE. FALLS CAN BE A LIFE AND DEATH ISSUE.**
- **BUT FALLING IS NOT INEVITABLE AS YOU GET OLDER. BY BEING PRO-ACTIVE, YOU CAN DO A LOT OF THINGS TO PREVENT FALLS.**

Talk given by Sue Griffin at the Women's Safety, Finance and Legal Fair held on 28th October 2008 in Ajijic, Mexico.