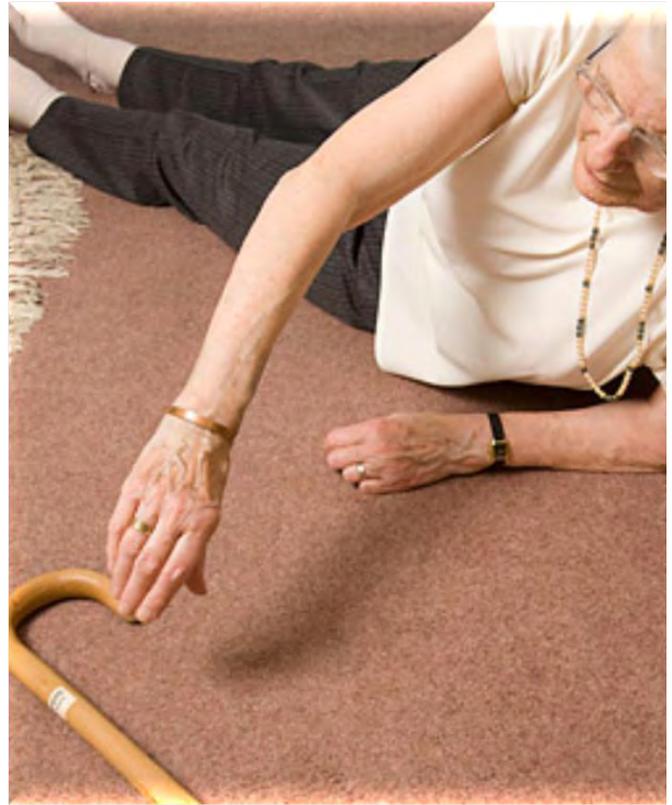


Fall Prevention & Home Safety Checklist

By Kate McCarthy

Falls change everything for the elderly. A fall usually results in fractures, which means hospitalization, time in rehab, physical therapy and major changes in their living situation. In many cases a fall means it is impossible for the aged person to remain independent at home. Most often, a fall is the trigger that starts a dangerous decline in elderly person's health.

Preventing falls needs to be taken seriously. Check your elderly loved one's home for safety hazards that increase their risk of falls and accidents. A thorough home evaluation is a great way to prevent senior falls and serious injury and is a good start to elder proofing the home. Taking steps to make the home suitable for those of advanced age will help ensure your loved one can remain independent at home longer.



Falls are life-changing events for the elderly.

Use these questions as a guide to making the home a safe place for your elderly loved one.

Exterior:

1. Are step surfaces non-slip?
2. Are step edges visually marked to avoid tripping?
3. Are steps even and in good repair?
4. Are stairway handrails present?
5. Are handrails securely fastened to fittings?
6. Are walking paths covered with a non-slip surface and free of objects that might cause tripping?
7. Are walking paths clear, safe and even with no holes in the concrete?
8. Is sufficient lighting available to provide safe ambulation at night?
9. Are leaves and snow cleared away?
10. Are tools and yard equipment safely and securely stored?

Helpful tips

- ✓ Poor lighting often contribute to trips and falls. Install light switches at the top and bottom of stairways to avoid using stairs in the dark.
- ✓ Install lights or colored tape on each step highlight the distinction between each step.
- ✓ Paint doorsills a different color than the floor.

Interior (Entry and Main Living Area):

1. Is the entryway clear of clutter with at least 36" wide access?
2. Do the door locks operate smoothly?
3. Does the porch light adequately light the porch and the door?
4. Are the light switches located near room entrances?
5. Are the lights bright enough to compensate for limited vision?
6. Are the lights glare free?
7. Are stairways well lit?
8. Are handrails present on both sides of stairway?
9. Are the handrails securely fastened?
10. Are the stairways free of objects?
11. Are there light switches at top and bottom of stairs?
12. Are the stairs marked to highlight the distinction between each step?
13. Are steps slip resistant?
14. Are steps even and uniform in size and height?
15. Are there smoke and carbon monoxide detectors present with fresh batteries?
16. Are all electrical outlets cool to the touch?
17. Are electric cords properly plugged in and safely tucked away?
18. Are there nightlights in halls and stairwells?
19. Are electric heaters placed away from rugs, curtains and furnishings?
20. Is the fireplace chimney clear of accumulation and inspected annually?
21. Are carpets in good repair with edges tacked or taped down?
22. Are linoleum and plastic stair treads secure?
23. Are throw rugs secured with non-slip backing and taped down?
24. Are floors finished in a non-slip way? Has high polish been avoided?
25. Are rooms uncluttered to permit unobstructed mobility?
26. Is water temperature reduced to prevent scalding?
27. Are water faucets clearly marked hot and cold?
28. Is the furnace checked yearly?
29. Are there established house-smoking rules?
30. Does room furniture allow easy access to doors and windows?
31. Do the doors, drawers and windows open and shut easily?
32. Is the furniture strong enough to provide support during transfers?
33. Are telephones easily accessible?

34. Are flashlights available in every room?
35. Is glow tape stuck on important items to identify them in dark?
36. Are cleaners and poisons clearly marked?
37. Are window and door locks sturdy and operational?
38. Are medications properly stored and usage instructions written down?
39. Is a first aid kit available with up-to-date supplies?

Helpful tips

- ✓ Improve the lighting in your home by using brighter bulbs, at least 60 watts.
- ✓ Use lampshades or frosted bulbs to reduce glare.
- ✓ Use uncut, low pile carpeting instead of thick pile to reduce tripping potential.
- ✓ Replace windows with polarized glass or apply tinted material to eliminate glare.
- ✓ Use chairs that have seating at least 14 –16 inches from the floor and sturdy armrests to provide leverage during sitting or rising for safer transfers.

Kitchen:

1. Are dishes and food stored on lower shelves for easy access?
2. Is step stool sturdy and have a high handle for support?
3. Are step stool treads slip resistant and in good repair?
4. Is lighting sufficient, especially over the stove, sink and counter-tops?
5. Are towels and curtains kept away from the stove?
6. Are electric appliances and their cords kept well away from the sink?
7. Is flooring non-slip?
8. Are the “Off” indicators on stove and appliances clearly marked with brightly colored tape?
9. Is there a telephone in the kitchen? Are emergency telephone numbers displayed including family contacts?
10. Is there a fire extinguisher within easy reach and in good order?
11. Are whistling teakettles and food timers in use?
12. If the pilot light on the stove goes out, is the gas odor strong enough to alert the homeowner?
13. Is food properly stored?
14. Are refrigerator and cupboards free of spoiled or expired food?
15. Are pots and pans of a lightweight type?
16. Are potholders and oven mitts available?
17. Are the appliances, including refrigerator and stove, in good working order?
18. Are pet dishes set out of walking area?
19. Are table and chairs strong and secure enough to provide support when leaning, standing or sitting?

Helpful tip

- ✓ A well-organized kitchen will make cooking and cleaning easier and prevent falls. Re-arrange frequently used items to avoid excessive bending and reaching. Use a hand-held reaching tool for hard-to-reach objects.

Bedroom:

1. Are lamp and light switches within reach of the bed?
2. Is the electric blanket in good working order?
3. Is the telephone accessible from the bed?
4. Is there an emergency telephone list near the telephone?
5. Is there a flashlight and a whistle near the bed?
6. Are medications stored away from the nightstand?
7. Is the bed an appropriate height for easy transfer?

Helpful tips

- ✓ It can be challenging, not to mention expensive, to keep fresh batteries in flashlights. Try purchasing flashlights that plug into the wall and remain constantly charged. Some rechargeable flashlights even have built in nightlights to make them easy to locate in the dark.
- ✓ Stand slowly when getting out of bed. Give your body time to adjust to an upright position.
- ✓ Wear well-fitting slippers and avoid nightwear that drags on the ground.
- ✓ Tie the belt on your robe.
- ✓ Keep pathways between the bed and bathroom and the bedroom door unobstructed by clutter or furniture.
- ✓ The bed should be at least 18" high (from the top of the mattress to the floor) to allow more comfortable and safe transfers.
- ✓ The edge of the mattress should be firm enough to support a seated person without sagging.

Bathroom:

1. Is the door wide enough for unobstructed access with or without an assistive device like a cane, walker, or wheelchair?
2. Is the threshold low enough to avoid being a tripping hazard?
3. Does the floor have a non-slip surface?
4. Are floor rugs secured with non-slip backing and carpet tape?
5. Are grab bars securely fastened next to the toilet and in the tub and shower areas?

6. Are there non-skid strips, decals or rubber mats in the tub or shower?
7. Is there a tub or shower seat available?
8. Is the toilet seat elevated for easy transfers?
9. Is there sufficient, accessible, glare-free light available?
10. Is there telephone access available in the bathroom?

Helpful tips

- ✓ If you are on strong medication or in a frail or delicate condition, do not bathe by yourself. Have someone assist you in and out of the bath and check on you periodically.
- ✓ Use a bath chair, grab bars and hand held shower to provide stability when bathing.
- ✓ Do not use towel bars for support.
- ✓ Check water temperature with your hand before entering the tub or shower.

Other Preventative Measures

Exercise regularly. Regular exercise increases strength, stamina, balance and coordination. It also helps to increase bone density and balance hormone levels. It improves circulation, blood pressure, and heart and lung health.

Do an annual Brown Bag Review. Simply place all medications, prescribed and over the counter meds, along with any herbal, nutritional and natural health supplements into a brown paper bag. Take it in to your doctor or pharmacist to review the meds for potential interactions or side effects like dizziness or sleepiness. The more information gathered about medications taken, the less likely there will be negative side effects from conflicting medications.

Have vision and hearing checked once a year. Both vision and hearing problems can increase fall risks.

Keep glasses clean.

Wear sturdy, well-fitting shoes with non-skid soles. Take care of the feet. Consult a doctor about any pain, numbness, tingling or any wounds that aren't healing properly.

Most home health agencies will perform a home safety inspection and make recommendations for insuring the safety of your loved. Occupational therapists will also make suggestions on how to improve safety at home.



Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their Residents since 1999. Together the two family owned companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley of Wisconsin.