

## When Slips Get Serious

### The Basics on Fall-Proofing Your Home

By Sharon Lewis

Falls can trip up people of all ages, but according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, most falls happen in the home to people age 65 and older during everyday activities. Eight out of 10 people killed by falls are over 65, and falls are the leading cause of injury-related death among the very elderly (people over 80 years old). Falls are also the leading cause of injury and hospital admission for older adults.

#### Fall-proofing the house

The best place to start fall-proofing your home, or that of an elderly relative, is at the front door. Make sure that there are handrails on both sides of the steps. To prevent people from tumbling in your home, vary the colors and textures on the floor to help accentuate

height differences and level changes.

Remember these points when fall-proofing your living and family rooms:

- Avoid shag carpeting. It can cause falls by getting caught on shoes, toenails and walkers.
- Avoid glass tables, as they are especially dangerous. Your best bet are sturdy wooden tables with rounded corners.
- Arrange furniture to provide open pathways.
- Keep electrical and telephone cords out of walkways.
- Remove hazards. Harmless-looking items like a child's crayon or a magazine on the floor can easily cause a fall.

#### Wipe away water

Wet surfaces may not appear dangerous until you step on them — and then it's too late. To avoid them:

- Clean up grease, water and other liquids immediately. Don't wax floors.
- Avoid climbing and reaching to high cabinets or shelves, or use a sturdy step stool with handrails.
- Keep a night-light on in your bathroom.
- Use bathroom rugs with nonskid backing.
- Install grab bars by toilets and in the shower and tub.
- Vary the colors in your bathroom so you can see everything clearly.
- Make sure shower stalls have code-standard shatterproof glass.

#### Don't let clutter accumulate

Older adults have a tendency to be pack rats. Children or friends of aging adults



can help prevent falls by safely packing away or storing excess furniture or knickknacks. In addition, older adults who are depressed, ill or lonely may let clutter pile up. Involve aging adults in activities to help keep them physically and mentally fit.

With a little effort, each of us can help make our home free from falls and safe from slips.

*Sharon Lewis is a freelance writer based in Geneva, IL.*



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