

# Simple Steps to Prevent Falls at Home

**H**alf of all falls happen at home. And most falls occur doing common, everyday activities. Up to one half of all falls can be blamed on home design.

If you haven't fallen at home, you're lucky. But your risk increases as you get older. Things like weaker muscles, poor eyesight, or medication that causes dizziness could increase your chances of falling as you age.

Older adults are most likely to fall when they:

- Fail to use handrails on stairs;
- Lose their balance;
- Reach for objects overhead;
- Climb on chairs, stepstools and ladders.

What can you do to prevent falls? Here is a list of things to improve safety around the house. Use this list as you inspect each room and the outside of your house. Check off each item after you've made the necessary changes.

## All Rooms

- Install carpet with short, dense pile.
- Secure rugs with double-sided carpet tape.

- Use non-skid, no-wax flooring.
- Make thresholds even with floor.
- Arrange furniture so you can easily get around it.
- Make sure electrical and extension cords are out of the way.
- Keep exits and hallways open.
- Use stable chairs with armrests to help you get up.
- Provide bright, evenly distributed light.
- Use lampshades that reduce glare.
- Make sure light switches and electrical outlets are easy to reach.
- Use nightlights.
- Don't leave things on the floor where you can trip over them.

## Stairs

- Put handrails on both sides of stairways. Be sure they're the right height for you.
- Make sure steps are even and in good repair.

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- Use non-skid contrasting tape, rubber stair treads, or coated, skid-resistant surface treatment on non-carpeted stairs. Apply tape to dry, clean surfaces at one-inch intervals. Use three long strips of tape on each step.
- Check carpeting to make sure it is firmly attached along stairs. Make immediate repairs to worn or loose carpet.
- Choose a carpet pattern that doesn't hide step edges, making it look like steps have ended when they haven't.
- Remove any rugs at the top or bottom of stairways. All rugs should be firmly secured to the floor.
- Use good lighting (at least 60-watt bulbs) in stairways. Install on-off switches at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Make sure stairs are clear of all objects.
- Watch out for a single step — people often trip when there is only one step.
- Be especially careful when you:
  - can't reach the handrails or they're placed too low;
  - can't grasp the railings;
  - see non-uniform steps, obstacles on the steps, or non-skid treads that are too small;
  - see floor wax, poor surface repair, worn tread surfaces, or poorly secured floor coverings;
  - see distractions around you.

- Take your time and pay attention when you're on the stairs.
- Be especially careful when you carry large loads.
- Don't wear shoes that you can slip in.

## Kitchen


- Use sturdy stepstools — preferably with handrails — to reach upper shelves. Throw away broken stepstools.
- Clean spills immediately to avoid slipping.
- Avoid floor wax. Don't walk on just-cleaned floors until they've dried completely.
- Don't stand on countertops.

## Bathroom

- Use rubber bathmats or strips in bathtubs and showers.
- Install at least two grab bars in the bath.
- Clean up water from the floor.
- Secure bathroom rugs to the floor.
- Use raised toilet seats and/or install handrails near the toilet.
- Always use a nightlight.

## Outside

- Be sure there is adequate lighting to get safely in and out of your house.
- Install handrails along any flight of outdoor steps.

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- Spread sand or salt on icy walkways.
  - Keep steps, sidewalks, decks, and porches clear of newspapers and sticks, rocks, wet leaves, and other debris.
  - Repair broken or uneven pavement on walkways and driveways.
  - Remove shrub or tree roots sticking out of the ground.

- Clean spills or slippery surfaces in garages or driveways immediately — especially oil or grease on cement floors.

Now that you know what to look for, do a spot check around your home from time to time. Being careful, and keeping your home well-lit and well-maintained will help you stay steady on your feet.

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