

Fall prevention in the elderly

Most of us are very concerned about what will happen to our loved one if he or she falls. Our unease goes beyond the fear of broken bones and cuts; our main apprehension is that one fall will lead to another and eventually to our loved one's lack of independence and decline of mobility and general health. The truth is that one third of all Americans over 65 do fall, and the danger of broken bones is very real because of osteoporosis afflicting so many older people. There are, however, many easy tips to help prevent falls, which can increase your loved one's safety as well as possibly your one. Fall prevention takes more common sense than money, but the prospect of avoiding injury is priceless.

The most important thing your loved one can do to prevent falls and subsequent injuries is to participate in a regular exercise program. Any exercise that improves balance and coordination, such as tai chi or yoga, is especially helpful because these components of physical health are lost due to the aging process. A lack of physical strength, balance, and coordination leads to general weakness, which makes falling more likely.

Another important aspect of fall prevention is making the home safer. Just as you would baby proof a home to protect your infant, you should make similar household changes to improve safety for your elderly loved one. Make sure the floors are clear of clutter, so that there is nothing your loved one could trip over. If you have small throw rugs, either remove them or use double-sided tape to keep them securely in place. In the bathroom, use non-slip mats in the tub or shower to prevent falls on the wet tile. Like wise, you should have grip bars installed in both inside the tub and near the toilet to prevent your loved one from pulling up on a sink or counter, which are not designed for that purpose. Make sure that any handrails by stairs are in good repair and not wobbly. Try to store frequently used items within arm's reach, and have a gripper nearby for items that are high or hard to get to. And don't forget the importance of good lighting. As you get older, you have vision changes, so the brighter the indoor light, the better. Sensible shoes are also a must. Who hasn't fallen off a pair of heels? Your loved ones need shoes with non-skid soles and good support, so they can stay on their feet.

Sometimes medications can make falls more likely. Medicines can have side effects such as drowsiness or lightheadedness, which can lead to falls. Meet with your loved one's doctor to review all medications to ensure that you and your loved one know what prescriptions are more likely to cause symptoms that increase the likelihood of falls. Make sure that your loved one's blood pressure is also monitored, because low blood pressure can cause dizziness



upon rising from a seated position.

Don't forget to get regular vision and hearing screenings as well. Vision problems like glaucoma and macular degeneration that affect the elderly increase your loved one's chance for falling, so make certain no vision problems go undiagnosed. Likewise, inner ear problems can cause dizziness and balance problems, so make sure his or her hearing is also tested.

As you can see from these suggestions, fall prevention is not rocket science. Keep your floors clear, wipe up spills, wear sensible shoes, check your vision. None of these things takes much time or effort, but they all add up to extra insurance against falls. The safety that such measures provide is worth it, both for your piece of mind and for your loved one's health.

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