

CHECKING YOUR HOME FOR FALL HAZARDS

Falls in and around the home are the most frequently occurring accident for older adults, injuries from which can threaten their health, mobility, and ability to live independently. VNA Care Network & Hospice's rehabilitation therapy staff recommends checking your home and eliminating common hazards to help reduce the risk for falls.

Bathroom

- Bathtub/shower has a nonslip mat or decals.
- Bath mat/rug has a nonskid backing or is secured to the floor.
- Grab bars are installed and securely fastened around the tub/shower and toilet. Wall-mounted soap dishes, towel bars, and other accessories should not be used in place of grab bars since they can come loose.
- Water temperature is checked before getting in the tub/shower. Falls can result from avoiding water that's too hot. Consider setting the water tank to 120 degrees or less.
- Night-light is installed and in working order.
- Bathroom door is kept unlocked in case of a fall.
- Towels, shampoo, and soap are easy to reach.
- Liquid soap or soap on a rope is used instead of a bar, which is easy to drop and slip on. Consider using a sponge with a long handle to wash hard to reach spots.
- An elevated toilet seat with safety bars is used if there is difficulty getting on or off the toilet.
- Shower chair and hand-held showerhead are used if there is difficulty standing in the shower.
- Floor is free of water even after a bath or shower.
- Path from bedroom to bathroom is well lit at night. (Have light switches or lamps that can be turned on before getting out of bed or entering a dark area. Night-lights can also be used.)

Stairs

- Handrails are located on both sides of the stairs and are securely fastened. Railings should cover the complete distance of the stairs or be slightly longer.
- Steps are in good condition (no loose, uneven, or broken steps).
- Edge of each step is marked with bright reflective tape or nonskid treads.
- Carpet is in good condition, free of tears and attached properly to each step. Consider removing shag carpets, deep-pile carpets, or carpets with busy patterns.
- Stairs are clear of shoes, books, and other items.
- Stairs are well lit and switches are located at the bottom and top of the stairway.

Lighting

- Bright, nonglaring light throughout the house with special attention paid to hallways and stairs.
- Lights, including lamps, are easy to turn on and off. Glowing switches make lights easier to find.
- Flashlight is available and in working order.
- Lights can be turned on without going into dark rooms first.
- Power failure lights are installed in electrical outlets.
- Overhead lights use a light switch instead of a pull cord. If a cord must be used, make it easy to pull without reaching overhead or looking up.

Living Areas/Hallways

- Items (shoes, clothes, boxes, books, etc.) are not left on floors even temporarily.
- Electrical, extension, telephone, and other cords are not placed across high traffic areas. Cords are kept tucked along walls.
- Doorsills/thresholds are low.
- Chairs, tables, and other pieces of furniture are sturdy in case they are used to lean on.
- Scatter rugs are removed or secured to the floor with double-sided tape or rubber matting.
- Carpets lie flat and edges are tacked or taped down.
- Torn or frayed carpet or linoleum is repaired, replaced, or removed.
- Paths are clear of furniture such as low coffee tables.
- Chairs and sofas are not low to the ground and have armrests to make standing up and sitting down easier. (Low furniture can be raised using boosters or other sturdy, stable materials.)
- A phone, such as a cordless, is at hand or an answering machine in use so there's no need to get up quickly and rush to answer calls. Post emergency numbers on or near the phone.
- Ceiling fans and overhead lights use a switch instead of a pull cord. If a cord must be used, make it easy to pull without reaching overhead or looking up.

Bedroom

- Lamp or light switch is easy to reach from the bed.
- Bed is at a height that makes it easy to get in and out. If too low, consider risers.
- A bed transfer bar is installed if there is difficulty getting in and out of bed.
- A telephone can be accessed without getting out of bed or reaching far.
- Eyeglasses are easy to reach from the bed.
- Path from the bed to bathroom is clear and well lit at night. A portable commode in the bedroom is considered when trips to the bathroom are difficult.

Kitchen

- Spills are cleaned promptly.
- Rubber mat is on floor in sink area.
- "On" and "off" are clearly marked on gas range dials.

Cupboards and Closets

- Frequently used and/or heavy items are placed on shelves at waist to shoulder height.
- A sturdy step stool with handrails is used to retrieve items on higher shelves.

Outside

- Steps, ramp, walkway, and driveway are free of cracks, holes, and bumps.
- The edges of steps are painted a bright color, especially if width and/or height of stairs are uneven.
- Stairs and walkways are kept clear of leaves, snow, ice, and other debris.
- Lights by entrances are in working condition.
- Doors are in good repair and easy to open and close.
- Handrails on stairs, porch, and deck are in good repair.

Other

- Chair is kept by the door, if needed, for sitting while putting on or taking off shoes or boots.
- Supportive shoes with nonskid soles and low heels are worn around the house.
- Cane, walker, or wheelchair is in good condition.
- Time is taken getting up and moving around the house. (Do not rush to answer a doorbell or phone, and make sure pets and young children aren't underfoot.)
- Reading glasses are taken off when not in use.

Health Considerations

Reviewing your home for fall hazards is just one thing you can do to reduce your fall risk. You should also consider:

- Medications, over-the-counter drugs, and vitamins are reviewed with your doctor to check for interactions and possible side effects like drowsiness, dizziness, and balance problems.
- Hearing and vision are checked on a regular basis.
- Regular exercise, under the advice of your doctor, is used to improve balance, strength, and flexibility.
- Lifeline medical alert system to quickly access emergency help in the event of a fall. (For Lifeline in Eastern and Central Massachusetts, call VNA Care Network & Hospice at 800-521-5539, ext. 5459.)

More Information

If you or a loved one is having difficulty living at home because of health issues, contact VNA Care Network & Hospice to see how we can help. Care is available in more than 200 communities in Eastern and Central Massachusetts. Learn more by calling 800-728-1862, e-mailing info@vnacarenetwork.org, or visiting www.vnacarenetwork.org.

