



FAREWELL TO FALLS

THE SITUATION

Both the fear of falling and a fall itself are real concerns for older Americans. The domino effects can be enormous, often resulting in injuries, an emergency department visit, hospitalization and even death. Individuals who have Alzheimer's disease or a related illness may face a greater risk of falling—as well as realize more severe complications from tumbles—largely due to altered mobility (i.e., balance, coordination) and cognition (i.e., judgment, spatial perception). But there are some simple strategies caregivers can employ to help reduce the risk of a fall.

THE SOLUTION

- **Clear out the clutter.** Excess clutter—including newspapers, knick-knacks, pet toys and packages—can block walkways and staircases, and increase the likelihood that someone will trip. Get in the habit of putting things away immediately. Remove excess furniture and arrange tables, chairs, etc. so that pathways are clear. Spring cleaning can be a great time to de-clutter space.
- **Light the way.** Place night lights or motion-sensitive lights strategically throughout the living space—in the kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom and hallway, and on the staircase.
- **Straighten up the stairway.** If stairs are carpeted, make sure the carpet is securely attached. On bare steps, affix slip-resistant treads to each step. Ensure that handrails are securely attached. Also remove or secure with slip-resistant backing any area- or throw-rugs at the top or base of the staircase—as well as anywhere else in the home.
- **Bump-proof the bathroom.** Use a slip-resistant rubber mat or textured adhesive on tub and shower floors to help reduce slips. Install grab bars and/or a durable seat in the tub or shower to ease access. If lowering oneself onto the toilet is a concern, consider installing a raised toilet seat.
- **Keep it within reach.** In the kitchen, keep dishes, pots, utensils and food within reach to reduce

the likelihood of stepping onto a stool, chair or countertop to grab something.

- **Wipe up spills.** Be sure to wipe or mop any excess water or other spills from the floor and around fixtures, especially in the kitchen and bathroom.
- **Build up your body.** Consult with a physician about appropriate diet and exercise. A healthy diet can help build bone strength. To avoid feeling faint or losing balance, say “yes” to plenty of water; to avoid frail bones, say “no” to alcohol and smoking. Strengthening exercises, such as chair rises and tai chi, may help strengthen leg muscles and improve balance.
- **Take stock of medications.** Certain medications—alone or in combination with one another—can cause dizziness or drowsiness. This also applies to over-the-counter drugs, such as pain relievers and allergy medications. Ask a doctor or pharmacist to do a medication review for possible side effects that can cause a fall.
- **Put your best foot forward.** Stretched-out slippers, high heels, socks and bare feet can increase the risk of falls. Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes with rubber non-skid soles. Keep laces tied and consider shoes that have another type of fastening (i.e., Velcro). And pay attention to pets, which could dart out quickly in your path, and cause a fall.
- **Check vision.** Ensure that eyeglass prescriptions are up to date. Monitor conditions such as cataracts or glaucoma that can adversely affect eyesight, including peripheral vision and depth perception.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Have a notification system in place, especially when people live alone. Consider medical alert products that notify a call center in the case of a fall or other emergency. Ask a family member, neighbor, etc. to check on the person daily by phone or in person—and take action if something seems amiss.