

Hazard Proofing Your Home

Your home is your haven, but it can be filled with hazards. this "safe haven" is where over 10 million Americans suffer injuries that require a trip to the emergency room (National Safety Council's ' Accident Facts', 1998 Ed.)



For older people, falls are especially dangerous. Falls increase their risk of fracturing bones in their wrists, spine, hips or elsewhere. The good news is that falls can be prevented with attention to safety. how do you make your home the safe place you want it to be? Here are some simple ways to make sure your home doesn't trip you up... literally.

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

The simpler things are, the less likely a fall will occur.

- The living rooms and dens of many homes are cluttered with a lifetime's worth of furniture and knick knock's. These become potential hazards when pathways are blocked, twisted or narrow.
- Look at your home room-by-room. Eliminate the clutter and discard potential hazards such as low ottomans, tables or magazine holders. Create straight, clear pathways between rooms as well as to doors and windows.
- Lower or remove thresholds where possible. That 3/4" high marble threshold to the bathroom may be attractive. But it can be a real hazard.
- Consider adding telephone extensions to avoid having to rush to grab the phone. There are extension units that plug into the electrical outlets (no wiring needed.) or, get a portable phone that can be carried between rooms.



Avoid Trip Ups

- Carpets are a major culprit when it comes to falls. Remove throw rugs and carpets with tassels or frayed ends. If you can't part with them, definitely install a nonslip backing. Get rid of worn carpeting: a common cause of trips and falls.
- Inspect your stairs to make sure they are sturdy. Pay special attention to any worn or loose carpeting that could cause a fall. To make steps more visible, install a slip,-resistant strip in a contrasting color to the front edge of each step.
- Steps must be well lit., with switches at both top and bottom. Where lighting is poor, alternating stair tread colors, is another way to make each step easier to see.



The Bathroom

- Pay special attention to hazard proofing your bathroom. Use bathroom rugs with non-skid backing. Or, consider carpeting the bathroom floor, as carpeting is more forgiving if there's a fall.

- Consider installing a bathtub transfer seat to help getting in and out of the tub without having to step over the tub wall.
- For showers, install a hand-held shower-head. Look for one with an on-off button that makes it easier to control water flow. Make certain that shower doors are made of tempered glass. (not plate glass). Another good safety precaution is to install an anti-scalding showerhead to avoid getting caught in a stream of too-hot water.



Some Bright Moves



Older eyes generally need more light than younger eyes to perform the same tasks. In the long run considering the financial and emotional cost of a fall - increasing the amount of light throughout your home is one of the least expensive safety precautions.

There are a variety of on-off sensors that will help create a safer environment. Install motion detectors onto lamps that turn on lights when a person enters a room. Wall switches with motion detectors can be useful to turn on lights in hallways.

For Safety's Sake... Other Ideas

Railings for stairs that permit an individual to strongly grasp the rail (hand wrapped fully around) will help prevent a fall if the individual loses balance. Install railings on both sides to make the railing accessible to a person going either up or down the stairway. For individuals with arthritis or less hand strength, grasping smooth, round door handles can be problematic. There are easy-to-install devices that convert round doorknobs to lever handles.



Get a step stool with handrails for the kitchen. If there are other areas with closets and cabinets that are difficult to reach, get a second one. Install shelves with roll-out trays or step-shelves in cabinets that make it easier to see and reach items.

When it's no longer easy to get up from that favorite chair, it may be time to get a chair that's easier to use. For chairs that are too low, building a sturdy platform beneath can make it easier to stand up or sit down. There are also lifting devices that can help.



Finally, don't overlook the area outside the home. Sidewalks and pathways should be level and smooth. Make certain the outside of your home is well lit. Install motion detectors that turn on and off lights when you approach. Consider a prefabricated, mini-ramp to help you get past single steps, such as the one outside sliding doors.