



CAREGIVER ASSISTANCE NEWS

“CARING FOR YOU ... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Falls & Home Safety

### Things You Can Do

Falls can occur any time, any place and to anyone while doing everyday activities such as climbing stairs or getting out of the bathtub. Simple safety modifications at home--where 60 percent of seniors' falls occur--can substantially cut the risk of falling. Protect the person in your care *and* yourself from falls with simple changes in furniture arrangement, housekeeping and lighting.

### Risk Factors

The causes of falls are known as *risk factors*. Although no single risk factor causes all falls, the greater the number of risk factors, the greater the probability of a fall and the more likely the fall will threaten personal independence.

Some people believe that falls are a normal part of aging, and as such are not preventable. But many risk factors *are* preventable. As obvious as it may sound, a lack of knowledge about risk factors and how to prevent them contributes to many falls.

Falls are the leading cause of injuries to older people in the United States. The number of falls and the severity of injury increase with age. While some risk factors for falls, such as heredity and age, cannot be changed, several risk factors can be eliminated or reduced.

### Home Adjustments

Make the home safe by following as many of these steps as possible:

■ Remove unnecessary furniture. Place remaining furniture so there's enough space for walkers or wheelchairs. This avoids the need for an older or disabled person to move around coffee tables and other barriers.

■ Once the person in your care has gotten used to where the furniture is, do not change it.

■ Make sure furniture will not move if it is leaned on.

■ Make sure the armrests of a favorite chair are long enough to help the person get up and down.

■ Have a professional carpenter install railings where a person might need extra support. (A professional installation ensures that railings can bear a person's full weight and not give way.)

■ Place masking or colored tape on glass doors and picture windows.

■ Use automatic night-lights.

■ Clear fire-escape routes.



### Home Safety - Quick Check

#### Bedroom

- ✓ Place a lamp, telephone and flashlight near the bed.
- ✓ Make sure beds are easy to get into and out of.
- ✓ Replace satiny sheets and comforters with nonslippery.
- ✓ Arrange clothes in the closet so that they are easy to reach.
- ✓ Keep clutter off all floors.

#### Kitchen

- ✓ Non-skid mats or rugs only.
- ✓ Clean up spills immediately.
- ✓ Store foods, dishes and cooking equipment within easy reach.
- ✓ Don't stand on chairs or boxes to reach upper cabinets.
- ✓ Use nonskid floor wax.

#### Bathroom

- ✓ Place rubber mat in shower and tub.

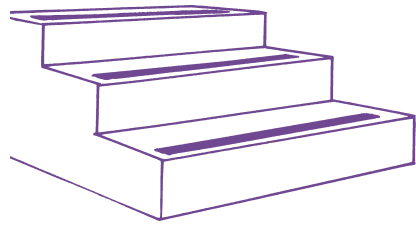
Source: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). For more information on "Prevent Injuries America," call AAOS public services at 1-800-824-BONES (2663).

The Ombudsman program can handle your concerns about areas such as elder abuse, client care, consumer rights, etc. For more information, call 1-800-582-7277.

For information about Ohio Medicaid programs or to report suspected Medicaid fraud, you may call the Ohio Medicaid Fraud Hotline at 1-800-324-8680.

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■Place nonskid tape on the edges of stairs (and consider painting the edge of the first and last step a different color from the floor).



- It is easier to walk on thin-pile carpet than on thick pile. Avoid busy patterns.
- Be sure stairs have even surfaces with no metal strips or rubber mats to cause tripping.
- Tape or tack electrical and telephone cords to walls.
- Adjust rapidly closing doors.
- Provide sufficient no-glare lighting--indirect is best.

### FAST FACT

More than one-third of adults 65 and older fall each year in the United States.

Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths. They are also the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma. Many people who fall, even those who are not injured, develop a fear of falling. This fear may cause them to limit their activities, leading to reduced mobility and physical fitness, and increasing their actual risk of falling.

Women are 67% more likely than men to have a nonfatal fall.

### Reducing Risk Factors

Older adults can take several steps to reduce their risk of falling.

**Exercising regularly.** Exercise programs like Tai Chi increase strength and improve balance.

**Ask a doctor or pharmacist to review medications,** both prescription and over-the-counter, to reduce side effects and interactions.

**Have vision checked** by an eye doctor at least once a year.

**Get up slowly after eating, sitting or lying flat.**

#### Dress Appropriately

- Wear properly fitted shoes with nonskid soles.
- Tie your shoe laces.
- Replace loose, shapeless slippers.
- Use a long-handled shoehorn if you have trouble putting on your shoes.
- Avoid high heels and shoes with smooth, slick soles.
- If unsteady, use a cane or walker.
- Never walk in your stocking feet.

Source: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/adultfalls.htm>



### Taking Care of Yourself--Get a Pedometer

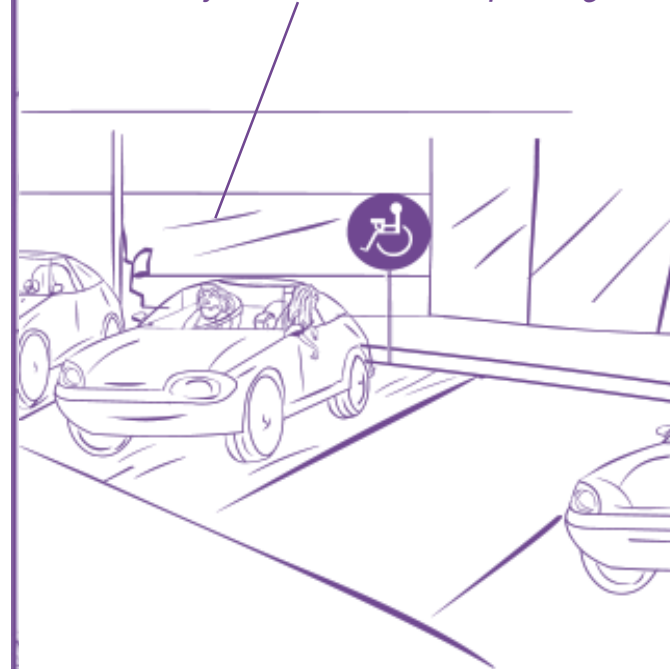
Pedometers--simple devices costing around \$25 are surprisingly effective at motivating to become more active, which pays big health dividends including weight loss, reduced stress and cholesterol levels, and lower blood pressure. Studies show that sedentary adults given a pedometer walked more than 2,000 extra steps a day--roughly a mile--and lost weight and blood pressure fell enough to significantly reduce the risk of stroke.

As adults Americans gain an average of two pounds a year. Two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight. Half don't get the minimum 150 minutes a week (30 minutes, five days a week) of moderately intensive exercise recommended for a healthy heart. Walking 10,000 steps a day can help. To reach this daily goal, you'll need to take a few brisk walks on top of your regular activities. Walking can rack up 3,000 to 4,000 steps in 30 minutes. The Web site [www.pedometers.com/reviews.asp](http://www.pedometers.com/reviews.asp) offers detailed reviews of pedometers. AARP members chart their step count online at [www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com](http://www.aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com).



### LIVE LIFE LAUGHING

*I see they are finally getting really serious about no parking.*



### Inspiration

*Everything is so dangerous that nothing is really very frightening.*  
~Gertrude Stein

### NOTE

Age-related vision problems increase the risk of falling. Cataracts and glaucoma alter older people's depth perception, visual acuity, peripheral vision and susceptibility to glare.