

Safety Article



The Utah Safety Council cares about your safety outside of the work setting. We offer resources that keep you and your loved ones safe at home, at play and on the go.

WHEN SLIPS GET SERIOUS: THE BASICS ON FALL-PROOFING YOUR HOME

Dolores Alford from Dallas knows more than most about preventing falls in the home. In addition to being a registered nurse and a geriatric nursing consultant who evaluates businesses for falling hazards, she also watches over her ailing husband. “He has cancer, and this has affected his balance,” she says.

To reduce the chances of a tumble, Alford has been very careful to reduce or eliminate clutter, slippery surfaces, and glass tables with unprotected edges along her husband’s pathways. And there are cordless phones everywhere in case her husband falls when he’s alone. “Preventing falls is all about being conscious of your surroundings,” Alford insists. Her concern is valid considering 41 percent of fall-related deaths occur in the home, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Falls can trip up people of all ages, but according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, most falls happen in the home to people age 65 and older during everyday activities. Eight out of 10 of those killed by falls are over age 65, and falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among the very elderly, those over age 80. Falls are also the leading cause of injury and hospital admission for older adults.

Start At The Front—Door, That Is

The best place to start fall proofing your home is at the front door. “My husband can’t even visit his niece and nephew because there are no handrails on the steps to the front door,” says Alford. However, even with handrails on both sides of your steps, you will still have people tumbling into your home if there’s no contrast where your doorjamb meets the floor. Vary the colors and textures on the floor to help accentuate height differences and level changes.

Make A Living Room Livable

Shag carpeting and rugs have got to go! While the thought of having shag carpeting in a house may turn some decorator’s stomachs, it may also increase the chances of a fall. Shag carpeting can cause falls by getting caught on shoes, toenails and walkers.

Remember these points when fall-proofing your living and family rooms:

- Glass tables are especially dangerous. You may receive further injuries if you fall onto one and the glass shatters. Your best bet: sturdy wooden tables with rounded corners.
- Arrange furniture to provide open pathways.
- Keep electrical and telephone cords out of walkways.
- Remove hazards. Harmless-looking items like a child’s crayon or a magazine on the floor can easily cause a fall.

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Wipe Away Water

Wet surfaces may not appear dangerous until you step on them—and then it's too late. Heed these tips to stay safe in your kitchen and bathrooms:

- Clean up grease, water and other liquids immediately. Don't wax floors.
- Avoid climbing and reaching to high cabinets or shelves, or use a sturdy step stool with handrails.
- Always keep a night-light on in your bathroom.
- Use bathroom rugs with nonskid backing.
- Install grab bars by toilets and in the shower and tub.
- Vary the colors in your bathroom. Having a white tub, white toilet and white walls is a big safety hazard, according to Alford. "If everything is one color, add bright decals and even red tape so older adults can see where the edges are."
- Be sure shower stalls have code standard shatterproof glass.

Don't Let Clutter Accumulate

Make sure walkways are well lit and clutter free. Remove any potential tripping hazards from indoor and outdoor spaces.

Kids Can Cause a Tumble

What do pets, kids and leaves have in common? They all have the potential to cause a frightening fall. "When leaves get wet, they're like stepping on a banana peel," says Alford. And kids and pets alike can frequently trip up a person. "We encourage older adults to have pets, but they must be disciplined not to jump on you," says Alford. "And children can grab your leg and easily knock you off balance." Visiting children may also leave toys scattered increasing the chance of an adult's fall. When grandchildren visit, be sure they pitch in and put toys away.

Take a Step in the Right Direction

Most falls occur from tripping over misplaced items, falling on slippery floors, or factors related to osteoporosis. And like it or not, as people age, changes in their vision, hearing, muscle coordination and reflexes make them more likely to fall. Stay fit and flexible. Maintain your physical strength to improve your balance to prevent falling. Falls can be prevented, and with a conscious effort everyone can help make their home free from falls and safe from slips.

Source: Family Safety & Health Fall 2000