

Taking Care!

Making changes to prevent life-altering falls!

By Lisa M. Petsche – lmepetsche@gmail.com

One in four adults aged 65-plus experiences a fall each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This statistic is based on self-reporting. The actual incidence is likely higher.

While taking a tumble may primarily hurt one's pride in their younger years, falls are the primary cause of injury and hospitalization for older adults. Half of those injured do not regain their former level of independence. Even more sobering, falls are one of the top ten causes of death for seniors.



**Lisa
Petsche**

The majority of falls take place at home during everyday activities. Most often they occur in the bathroom, bedroom or a stairwell.

Follow the tips below to help preserve your physical functioning, well-being and independence, or that of someone for whom you're providing care.

Physical Health

- Get regular medical checkups, including vision and hearing tests.
- Take medications as prescribed. Fill all prescriptions at one pharmacy. Ask the pharmacist about available aids for organizing and remembering to take medications.
- Stay physically active and exercise regularly to help with posture, flexibility, muscle strength, bone mass, cardiac health and overall wellness.

Safety

In addition to health- and age-related changes, hazardous conditions in the home environment are a major cause of falls. Here are some ways to reduce these hazards for yourself or a loved one:

- **In Stairwells:** Ensure steps are in good repair and have a non-skid surface. Keep them free of clutter. Have solid handrails installed on both sides of stairways and ensure adequate lighting.
- **In the Kitchen:** Keep regularly used pots, dishes, staple foods and other supplies within easy reach. Ensure the heaviest items are stored in the lower cupboards. If you must reach high places, get a step stool that has a high handrail and rubber tips.
- **In the Bathroom:** Have grab bars professionally installed by the toilet and in the bathtub or shower area. Use a rubber mat in the tub or shower, and a non-skid bath mat on the floor. Consider getting a raised toilet seat, a bathtub seat or shower chair and a hand-held shower attachment.

General Tips

- Wear slippers or shoes that fit snugly, offer good support and have a non-skid sole.
- Ensure throw rugs and scatter mats have a non-skid backing. Better yet, remove them.
- Keep walkways clear of electrical cords.
- Avoid clutter in rooms and hallways and on stairs.
- Use night-lights in the bedroom, hallways and bathroom. Get the kind that have a built-in sensor that automatically turns the light on in dim conditions. Also get plug-in, rechargeable flashlights that automatically come on when the power goes out.
- Sign on with a personal emergency response service, whereby you wear a lightweight, waterproof pendant or bracelet that has a button to press if you run into a crisis and need help.
- Visit a medical supply store and check out the many products available – such as reachers and electric-lift armchairs – that can make daily activities safer. If you are caring for someone at a high risk for falls – due to physical frailty or poor judgment stemming from cognitive impairment, for example – inquire about bed alarms and chair alarms that alert you when the care receiver attempts to get up.
- Consider a cane or walker if balance is an ongoing problem. It's important to be fitted with the appropriate type of aid and receive instruction on how to properly use it.
- Arrange for a home assessment by an occupational therapist if you'd like more information about identifying potential safety hazards and successfully addressing them. The therapist may point out areas of risk and make recommendations that would not have occurred to you.

Lisa M. Petsche is a social worker and freelance writer specializing in boomer and senior concerns.