

## Preventing Falls in Your Home



By David Jagoda, VNSW Director of Rehabilitation Services

***Falls can occur to anyone at any time.*** From a tiny baby running across the room to an older adult losing their balance, falls can range from a simple bruise to a fracture and, unfortunately, can even result in fatalities. Falls are usually non-threatening but, as we age, falls become a common occurrence for those 65 or older. ***Studies show that 30% of people over the age of 65 fall each year and the incidence increases to 50% for those over the age of 80.***

Each year 10% of older adults have a serious injury such as a fracture, joint dislocation or head injury (requiring hospitalization) as a result of a fall. ***Since most falls occur in the home, ideally we would like an environment that is safe and sound.*** Yet accidents will occur. With shorter days and earlier darkness, or a pair of shoes left in the middle of the room, or autumn leaves that have gathered outside our door, or rushing around in preparation of holiday meals and events and -- perhaps more impactfully -- with the oncoming ice and snow, we're all at increased risk for a fall.

***That said, many falls can be prevented.*** Assessing your home and establishing a safety checklist can help ensure safety and independence for you and your loved ones all year-round.

### Tips for “fall-proofing” your home:

#### GENERAL HOUSEHOLD:

- Have **adequate lighting**, especially around stairwells. Having a nightlight in the bedroom and bathroom aids vision. Consider using higher watt bulbs.
- Place **handrails on both sides of stairways**. Have non-skid treads or carpeting on stairs.

- **Keep floors clutter-free.** Remove items you can trip over. Ensure that there are clear paths for moving through your home.
- **Rugs should be firmly fixed.** Use double-sided tape to keep rugs from slipping. Small throw rugs near doorways should be secured.
- **Wear proper footwear,** slippers and shoes in the home.
- **If you use a walker or cane,** follow the directions that were set up by your therapist or doctor. Make sure the height of your device is correctly adjusted to your needs.
- **Use a cordless phone** and keep it by your side. It's easier to have a phone readily available than running to answer the phone across the room.
- Make sure that there are **no loose wires** or extension cords that you can trip over.
- **Wear your glasses** or contact lenses to help you see better.
- Consider an **emergency response system,** especially for the elderly living alone.

#### **KITCHEN:**

- **Avoid highly polished or waxed** kitchen floors.
- Keep **frequently-used items within reach,** minimizing the use of a step stool.
- Place items that are used more frequently on **lower shelves.**

#### **BATHROOM:**

- **Install grab bars** on the bathroom walls, especially by the toilet and shower.
- **Use assistive devices** such as a shower seat or tub bench for bathing.
- Consider a **raised toilet seat** for safety and independence, or consider a bedside commode if nighttime toileting is an issue.
- Use **non-slip mats** in the bathtub or on shower floors.

#### **OUTDOORS:**

- Use **ice-melting products** for icy driveways or sidewalks.
- **Clean paths** for easy access. Remove snow and ice.
- **Remove wet leaves** which are very slippery.