

Check for Safety

This checklist is a publication of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Falls at Home

Each year, thousands of older Americans fall at home. Many of them are seriously injured, and some are disabled. In 1996, more than 8,500 people older than age 65 died because of falls.

Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but easy to fix. This checklist will help you find and fix those hazards in your home.

The checklist asks about hazards found in each room of your home. For each hazard, the checklist tells you how to fix the problem. At the end of the checklist, you will find other tips for preventing falls.

Floors

- **Look at the floor in each room.**
- **When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?**
 - Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.
- **Do you have throw rugs on the floor?**
 - Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a nonslip backing so the rugs won't slip.
- **Are papers, magazines, books, shoes, boxes, blankets, towels, or other objects on the floor?**
 - Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.
- **Do you have to walk over or around cords or wires (like cords from lamps, extension cords, or telephone cords)?**
 - Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. Have an electrician put in another outlet.

Stairs and Steps

- **Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home.**
- **Are papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?**
 - Pick up things on the stairs. Always keep objects off the stairs.
- **Are some steps broken or uneven?**
 - Fix loose or uneven steps.
- **Are you missing a light over the stairway?**
 - Have a handyman or an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- **Has the stairway light bulb burned out?**
 - Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.
- **Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)?**
 - Have a handyman or an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.
- **Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs?**
 - Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.
- **Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?**
 - Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove the carpet and attach nonslip rubber treads on the stairs.

Kitchens

- **Look at your kitchen and eating area.**
- **Are the things you use often on high shelves?**
— Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist-high).
- **Is your step stool unsteady?**
— Get a new, steady step stool with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.

Bedrooms

- **Look at all your bedrooms.**
- **Is the light near the bed hard to reach?**
— Place a lamp close to the bed where it is easy to reach.
- **Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?**
— Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

Bathrooms

- **Look at all your bathrooms.**
- **Is the tub or shower floor slippery?**
— Put a nonslip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
- **Do you have some support when you get in and out of the tub or up from the toilet?**
— Have a handyman or a carpenter put in a grab bar inside the tub and next to the toilet.

Other Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

- Exercise regularly. Exercise makes you stronger and improves your balance and coordination.
- Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy.
- Have your vision checked at least once a year by an eye doctor. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling.
- Get up slowly after you sit or lie down.
- Wear sturdy shoes with thin, nonslip soles. Avoid slippers and running shoes with thick soles.
- Improve the lighting in your home. Use brighter light bulbs (at least 60 watts). Use lampshades or frosted bulbs to reduce glare.
- Use reflecting tape at the top and bottom of the stairs so you can see them better.
- Paint doorsills a different color to prevent tripping.

Other Safety Tips

- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall and can't get up.

For more information, contact:
The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention
4770 Buford Highway, N.E., Mailstop K-63
Atlanta, GA 30341