

PREVENTING FALLS

Safety Checklist

Nearly one-third of people over the age of 65 fall each year, and that figure increases to 50% by age 80.

For seniors, falls in and around the home are the most frequently occurring accident.

In fact, falls are the seventh leading cause of death in people over age 65.

A study reported in The New England Journal of Medicine found that preventing falls and the resulting injuries can reduce or delay the need to move to a long-term care facility.

After a disabling fall, the longer you wait for help, the greater the risk of serious complications and even death.

Studies confirm that getting help quickly after a fall reduces the risk of:

- ▶ Hospitalization by 26%
- ▶ Death by over 80%

Here are TWO major causes of falls in and around the home:

Health and age-related changes, such as:

- ▶ Use of certain medications
- ▶ Slow reflexes
- ▶ Poor eyesight
- ▶ Problems with balance

Dangerous situations in the home, such as:

- ▶ Slippery floors
- ▶ Poor lighting
- ▶ Electrical cords in pathways
- ▶ Loose rugs
- ▶ Raised thresholds
- ▶ Clutter

Most falls in the home occur in bathrooms, bedrooms and on stairs.

The Checklist on the reverse side is designed to help you minimize the risk of falling in your home.

1. Tinetti ME, Williams CS. Falls, injuries due to falls, and the risk of admission to a nursing home. *N Engl J Med.* 1997;337:1279-1284.
2. Roush RE, Teasdale TA, Murphy JN, Kirk MS. Impact of a personal emergency response system on hospital utilization by community residing elders. *South Med J.* 1995;88:917-922.
3. Guiley RJ, Lum N, Lo B, Katz MH. Persons found in their homes helpless or dead. *N Engl J Med.* 1996;334:1710-1716.



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Fall Prevention Checklist

- > Have a lamp or light switch that you can easily reach without getting out of bed.
- > Use night-lights in the bedroom, bathroom and hallways.
- > Keep a flashlight handy.
- > Have light switches at both ends of stairs and halls. Install handrails on both sides of stairs.
- > Turn on the lights when you go into the house at night.
- > Add grab bars in shower, tub and toilet areas.
- > Use bath mats with suction cups.
- > Use non-slip adhesive strips or a mat in the shower or tub.
- > Consider sitting on a bench or stool in the shower.
- > Consider using an elevated toilet seat.
- > Wear non-slip, low-heeled shoes or slippers that fit snugly. Don't walk around in stocking feet.
- > Remove all extraneous clutter in your house.
- > Keep telephone and electrical cords out of pathways.
- > Tack rugs and glue vinyl flooring so they lie flat. Remove or replace rugs or runners that tend to slip, or attach non-slip backing. Ensure that carpets are firmly attached to the stairs.
- > Use helping devices, such as canes.
- > Keep snow and ice off entrances and sidewalks.
- > Purchase a step stool with high and sturdy handrails. Repair or discard wobbly step stools. Do not stand on a chair to reach things. Store frequently used objects where you can reach them easily.
- > Paint the edges of outdoor steps and any steps that are especially narrow or are higher or lower than the rest.
- > Paint outside stairs with a mixture of sand and paint for better traction. Keep outdoor walkways clear and well lit.
- > Review medications with your doctor or BLACKBURN'S pharmacist. Some drugs, including over-the-counter drugs, can make you drowsy, dizzy and unsteady.
- > Watch your alcohol intake. More than two drinks per day can cause unsteadiness.
- > Have your hearing and eyesight tested. Inner ear problems can affect balance. Vision problems make it difficult to see potential hazards.
- > Exercise regularly to improve muscle flexibility and strength.
- > If you feel dizzy or light-headed, sit down or stay seated until your head clears. Stand up slowly to avoid unsteadiness.

If you have additional questions concerning fall prevention or medical equipment, please call or visit:



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