

Preventing Falls and Fractures – Information for Supporters and Providers

Did you know that most falls take place at home and most fractures result from a fall in the home? Individuals may also experience falls in day programs. Persons with developmental disabilities may have some increased risk for falling due to conditions such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy or the side effects of some prescribed medications. Older adults are also more likely to fall due to changes in their senses such as declining eyesight and difficulties with balance.

This checklist is aimed at making the home or day program a place where falls and resulting fractures are less likely to happen.

General

- Be sure that individuals needing assistive devices (canes, walkers) use them properly.

Stairs and Steps

- Have light switches at both the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Provide enough light to see well on the stairs and landings.
- Have flashlights with good batteries near stairs in case of power outage.
- Have handrails on both sides of the stairway.
- Do not leave any objects on the stairs.
- Motion detector lights near stairs are a good idea so no one is tempted to use stairs in the dark.
- Put non-slip treads on bare wood steps for increased traction.
- Keep carpeted stairs in good repair with no loose edges.
- Do not use loose scatter rugs near the top or bottom of the stairs.

Bathrooms

- Grab bars should be installed next to the toilet and along the tub or shower. Check regularly for strength of the installation.
- Use rubber backed bathmats and rubber mats or rubber strips in showers and tubs for stability.
- Have a bath bench or shower chair available and in good repair for consumers who may need one.

Bedrooms

- Encourage regular room cleaning and keeping clutter from floors
- Have a lamp and a flashlight near each bed.
- It is a good idea to have night lights plugged into outlets along the route from bedroom to bathroom.
- Be sure that each individual has a bed that is the correct height to get in and out comfortably.
- If an individual needs assistance to get in or out of bed, have some sort of bell or calling device to summon help.

Living Room/Family Room

- Arrange furniture to create clear pathways from room to room.
- Remove low items such as coffee tables, plants, footstools from pathways.
- Be sure that light switches are located at doorways so you do not have to cross a dark room to get to the switch.
- Secure area rugs with backing tape and check often to see that it is still secure.
- Keep electrical cords out of pathways but do not put cords under rugs.
- Get rid of or repair wobbly chairs or tables.
- Carpeting is a good option for floor covering whenever possible since injury may be lessened in the event of a fall.

Kitchen

- Do not use throw rugs in the kitchen.
- Immediately clean up spills from the floor.
- Store frequently used dishes, food and utensils where they may be easily reached without using a stool or stretching.
- When a step stool is needed, use the type with an attached handrail.
- Do not wax floor or use a special non-skid wax.
- These little tips may help someone avoid a fall and perhaps a serious injury. Who knows, that person may be you!

Outdoors

- Providing good outdoor lighting on walkways and driveways
- Keep hoses out of walkways and driveways
- When it is icy, putting sand or salt on porches and other walkways
- Reminding people who are at risk of falling to slow down

Remember: Prevention is the Number One Priority!

Even with the best planning and precautions, some falls will still happen. Once you become aware that someone has fallen down, you should quickly assess the situation to decide what to do. To assess the situation, you should listen to what the person who has fallen is saying about how they feel, ask questions to get more details, and look for signs of bleeding or broken bones.

If the individual who has fallen appears to be seriously hurt, you should call 911 for emergency help. You should not move the person until help arrives.