

## **REDUCING YOUR RISK OF A FALL**

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**Although many jokes have been made about the lifeline commercials you see you on television, you know the one, "Help I've fallen and I can't get up." The reality is that falls are no laughing matter. Falls can lead to serious injuries or even result in death. Fractured hips and subdural hematomas (blood clot in the brain), which are both very serious injuries, are oftentimes the results of a fall. Falls may also cause dehydration and decubitus ulcers (pressure sores), when a person waits hours or days to be found, after they have fallen. Hopefully, after reading this article everyone will take falls more seriously.**

**Why do people fall?**

**#1- Environmental factors cause 1/3 to 1/2 of all falls in the home. These hazards include Slippery rugs or floor surfaces, multiple throw rugs scattered throughout the house, Poor lighting, unsafe stairs and unsteady shoes or slippers.**

**#2- Health conditions also contribute to falls. These conditions include dizzy spells, osteoporosis (sometimes a hip will fracture and then a person will fall), structural problems of the feet, stroke, visual impairments and lack of mobility.**

**#3- Fear of falling in the elderly population is very common. This fear may lead to a restrictive lifestyle, reduced mobility and isolation. Reduced mobility may actually cause more falls due to muscle atrophy, joint stiffness and poor physical condition due to lack of exercise.**

**How can fall risk be reduced?**

**#1- Get rid of slippery rugs or floor surfaces and those multiple throw rugs that are scattered throughout your house. If you can't bear to part with throw rugs secure them with carpet tape or use a non-skid rug pad. Loose carpet edges should be secured with double-sided carpet tape.**

**#2- Clean up spills as they occur.**

**#3- Get a pick stick to pick up items that you can't reach.**

**#4- Keep stairs and walkways free of clutter. Keep lamp, extension and phone cords out of traffic flow areas. Arrange furniture so that it is not an obstacle.**

**#5- Keep small pets from under foot.**

**#6- Repair any stairways that are unsafe. Edges of steps should be even and of the same size and height. You may also need to install a sturdy, hand rail, extending the length of both sides of your stairway.**

**#7- Increase the lighting in your home. Use nightlights or bedside remote control light switches at night to light the way to the bathroom. Keep doorways closed to basement areas, as many falls occur when a person mistakes the basement doorway for the bathroom and falls down the stairs in the dark. Keep stairways, halls and walkways well lit.**

**#8- Ice and snow need to be removed from steps and walkways.**

**#9- Wearing unsafe shoes or slippers puts you 6 times more at risk for a fractured hip. Wear sturdy, non-slip shoes at all times, even when in the house. Shoes should be firmly fastened, velcro closings or cotton laces are a good choice. Shoes should have a non-skid sole with less than a ½ inch heel. Shoes should contain enough space for the toes to lie flat and straight. Fabric or leather should surround the entire foot for adequate support. In regards to slip-on slippers (open in the back), these can cause you to trip.**

**#10- Install sturdy grab bars inside your tub or shower. Tubs/showers should also have non-skid mats or non-slip surfaces. You may also want to install grab bars near the toilet.**

**#11- Take your medication as ordered by your physician. This will help in controlling symptoms that may increase your risk of a fall.**

**#12- Stay in good physical condition with a moderate daily exercise regimen to reduce your risk of falls and fall injuries. With increased exercise you can increase your bone mass, muscle strength, flexibility, balance and range of motion. Here are some exercise ideas: Walking, hand weights, join a health club or exercise at home with the help of television programs or exercise videos. Always consult with your physician before beginning any exercise program.**

**#13- You should have your vision checked regularly and prescription glasses/contacts should be updated as needed. Always keep a pair of glasses handy, especially when you get up at night.**

**Information for this article was obtained from the Renton, Washington Fire Department. The Renton Fire Department can be found at [www.ci.renton.wa.us/fire](http://www.ci.renton.wa.us/fire).**