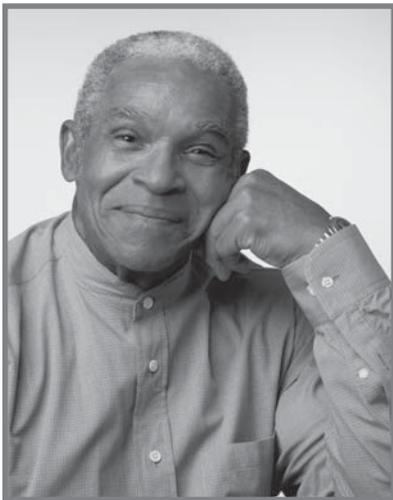


Fall Prevention Home Safety Checklist

What YOU Can Do To Prevent Falls



Making Minnesota A Safer Place To Live
Chapter of the National Safety Council



Falls are a serious public health problem among older adults. In the United States, one of every three seniors over 65 years fall each year, and falls are the leading cause of injury death for seniors 65 and over. Simply making changes to the home does not reduce falls. However, certain risk factors in the home environment may contribute to about half of all home falls. Homes that were perfectly convenient one year can cause problems in later years. Changing physical abilities can make daily routines more difficult. It makes sense, then, to make changes to existing homes, or build in features in new construction that will help create a safer environment.

For specific recommendations to prevent falls, complete the Fall Prevention Checklist for every room in your house.

Entrance

Whether it's the front door or the back door—this is where you greet guests, haul in groceries, fetch the mail, take in the paper, and so much more.



Do you have tile or linoleum floors at your front or back doors?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Whenever you're moving from one kind of floor surface to another, the change in surface texture can put you at risk for falls. (Especially if it's raining or snowing outside and your feet bring some of that moisture inside to a slick surface.) Have solid, non-stick areas inside any entrance to help secure footing.

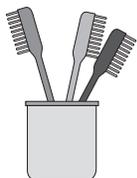
Do you have a small deck landing (less than 5' square) at the front or back entrance?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Small landings can cause awkward turns to make room for an outward swinging door. This is a fall risk. You want to have enough room to the side of your door to avoid the door swing. Add to your deck or remount the door to minimize this kind of clumsy entrance.

Bathroom

Combine a smooth surface like tile with water, what do you get? A quick recipe for falls. And as one of the most highly trafficked rooms in your home, the bathroom can be a good place for some fall prevention.



Is the path from the bedroom to the bathroom dark?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Install nightlights along the hallway—even every outlet. Let them light your way.

Do you use towel racks for balance or to grab onto while getting in or out of the bathtub/shower?

- YES
 NO

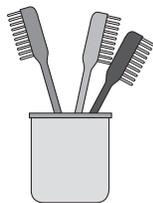
Yes: Towel racks may not be mounted well enough to support a person's weight. Install grab rails next to and inside the tub and next to the toilet. Sometimes a bathroom wall needs to be reinforced to make sure the grab rails can support a person's weight. If you're planning a bathroom redo, consider the convenience of a walk-in shower.

Is it difficult to stand during a shower?

- YES
 NO

Yes: A shower seat allows you to shower without getting tired or risking a fall because of dizziness. It can also eliminate bending to wash feet or shave legs.

Bathroom (continued)



No: Sometimes the heat and humidity in the shower can make you light headed unexpectedly. Or an occasional virus might leave you temporarily weak. You may still want to consider a shower seat or grab bars in the shower for extra security.

Is the shower floor or bathtub slippery? Is there water on the floor? Are there leaks from the tub or shower?

YES
 NO

Yes: Install non-skid strips or a non-slip mat. Patch leaks with caulk or other appropriate material. Wipe up spills immediately. Get a plumber to check fixtures and seals.

Is it necessary to reach far or turn around to get towels, shampoo, and soap?

YES
 NO

Yes: A shower/bath storage unit that attaches to the side of the tub or shower wall can reduce the need to reach or turn around to get things. You may find that liquid soap in a dispenser is more convenient. Fishing for that slippery bar of soap that fell in the tub can be dangerous

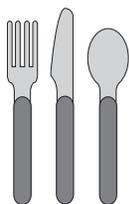
Is it difficult to get on and off the toilet?

YES
 NO

Yes: It may be helpful to raise the seat and/or install handrails.

Kitchen

What's cooking in the kitchen? Don't let it be a fall! But if you're preparing meals or cleaning up, you might be doing several things at once. Slow down! Move deliberately. Take an extra trip rather than load up your arms. Wipe up any spills you might step in. Close cabinets and drawers when you're not using them.



Are the things you use often on high shelves?

YES
 NO

Yes: Move items around in your cupboards. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist high). Do not put heavy items on shelves where you have to reach up. Installing sliding shelves or lazy susans in corner cupboards can help you make your most convenient shelves hold more of what you use the most.

Is your step stool unsteady?

YES
 NO

Yes: Get a new, steady step stool with a bracing bar to hold on to. Most of them fold up for easy storage, and have sturdy, non-skid steps and legs that grip the floor to help keep you steady. Retire the old one. An old step stool is not an heirloom, it's a safety hazard!

Do you use chairs, boxes or makeshift items to reach high shelves?

YES
 NO

Yes: Get a new sturdy step stool.

Is it necessary to reach far or bend over to get commonly used items and foods?

YES
 NO

Yes: Rearrange cupboards. Put items you use every day in your most convenient cupboard.

Kitchen *(continued)*

Is there liquid, food or grease or other clutter on the floor?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Sweep often and wipe up spilled liquids immediately to reduce the chances of slipping.

Bedroom

You're tired. You're getting ready for bed, or perhaps you've just gotten up. You're not wearing your glasses. It's dark. Make sure your bedroom is an oasis of safety—not an obstacle course.



Is there a long reach from the bed to a light switch?

- YES
 NO

Yes: It's good to have a light switch within easy reach of where you sleep. Move the lamp closer to the bed or attach a small lamp to the headboard to reduce the risk of falling—either from over reaching or from moving about in the dark.

Do you need to get out of bed or reach far to answer the telephone?

- YES
 NO

Yes: A longer phone extension cord can help bring the phone closer to the bed. Even better, a cordless phone within easy reach of the bed means you can just move the handset close to the bed.

Cords are a tripping hazard. Reroute cords so they don't cross where you walk. That might mean getting a longer extension cord so it can travel along a wall instead of across the room. Or consider getting an electrician to install additional outlets.

Don't fasten cords to the wall with staples or nails. Use tape designed for this purpose.

Is there clutter (clothes, shoes, newspapers, books, etc.) on the floor?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Pick-up clutter from walkways to reduce the chances of tripping. Do you have to reach up to pull cords to lights or ceiling fans?

Have a phone close to the floor in order to call for help in the event of a fall.

Do you need to wear glasses to see?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Make sure you put your eyeglasses within easy reach.

Are there telephone, light or television cords running along the floor or the walkways?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Install longer cords or link ceiling lights/fans to a light switch on the wall to eliminate the need to look and reach up.

Do you get up many times during the night to use the bathroom?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Place a portable commode near the bed to eliminate nighttime trips to the bathroom.



Living Areas



Do you have to walk around furniture to walk through a room?

- YES
 NO

Yes: It's best to have a straight path through any and every room. Consider rearranging the furniture to clear a path and provide an obstacle-free walk. It might even mean having less furniture in a room. It will look bigger, and be safer!

Do carpets, rugs or floor coverings have frayed corners or rolled-up edges?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Remove damaged floor coverings or secure them well with double-sided tape, or nails. It is important to have a flat, sturdy walkway.

Do you have throw rugs or runners in walkways?

- YES
 NO

Yes: It is best to throw away the throw rugs. They can slip easily and cause a fall. Or you could try double-sided tape on them so they do not slip. If you use double-sided tape, get special purpose carpet tape and check it regularly to make sure it is holding all edges of the rug securely.

Some throw rugs have rubber or non-skid backing. Check them regularly—sometimes the backing comes off after frequent laundering.

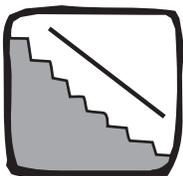
Are chairs and couches low to the ground?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Higher chairs and armrests are helpful for easing into a sitting position. Sometimes adding a throw pillow on the cushion can help.

Stairs and Steps

Even if you are very familiar with the stairs, lighting is an important factor. You should be able to turn on the lights before you use the stairway from either end. Don't carry loads that block your vision. Instead, make several trips with smaller loads.



Are papers, shoes, books or other objects on the stairs?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Always keep objects off the stairs. It's easy to ignore loose items on the steps and lose your footing. An extra kitchen chair can be placed near a stairway to collect things that are heading to another floor—just make sure the chair is not blocking a walkway.

Do you walk around the house in slippers or socks?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Try to avoid wearing socks or smooth-soled shoes or slippers, especially on the stairs.

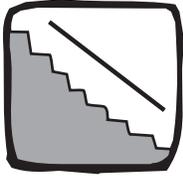
Are some steps broken or uneven?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Fix loose or uneven steps. Even a small difference in step surfaces or riser heights can lead to falls. Wooden steps off your porch or deck outside can rot or weaken over time and may need to be replaced. Stair treads should be deep enough for your whole foot—at least 8 inches, but 10 to 11 is better. A stair rise should be no higher than 7 inches from one step to the next; a smaller rise is even better.

Stairs and Steps

(continued)



Are you missing a light over the stairway?

- YES
 NO

Yes: 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?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Have a friend or family member change the light bulb. Use newer style bulbs that have longer life than traditional bulbs.

Do you only have one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)? Or do the switches at the top AND the bottom of the stairs both have to be on for the light to work?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Have a handyman or an electrician put in an independent light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. Light switches that glow can help.

Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs?

- YES
 NO

Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure that the handrail is secured into the studs in the wall—you may need to hire a handyman to help. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are at least as long as the stairs.

Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads on the stairs.



Outside

Are outdoor steps slippery, depending on the weather and time of year?

- YES
 NO

Yes. Paint outside steps with a paint that has a rough texture, or use abrasive strips.

Is the path from your garage to your door dark or poorly lit?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Installing a path of lights or overhead light will help reduce the chance of falling. Sensor lights (“motion lights”) mounted on the house or garage are helpful too, because they turn on and off automatically. You can’t avoid what you can’t see.



Are there hoses, weeds or other obstacles on your sidewalks?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Remove clutter and keep walkways weeded to eliminate tripping hazards.

Stairs and Steps

(continued)

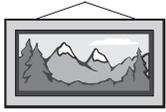
Are your steps or walkways icy?

YES

NO

Yes: Shovel immediately after a storm and/or apply salt or sand on ice to reduce the chance of slipping.

Hallways



Are hallways and passageways between rooms darker than the other rooms in your house?

YES

NO

Yes: Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the hall fixture. If you do not know the correct wattage, use a 60-watt bulb. Consider adding more lamps or light fixtures in dark hallways. You don't want lighting to produce glare or shadows. If this is a problem, try frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, or lampshades.

Personal Risk Factors

Falls severely impact the health, independence, mobility and quality of life of older adults. Half of all older adults hospitalized for hip fractures cannot return home or live independently after their injuries. Evaluate your personal risk factors to reduce your risk.

Have you fallen before? Were you injured when you fell?

YES

NO

Yes: People who have fallen before are more likely to fall again. Think about the factors that led to your last fall. Take action to reduce those factors. Consider using a personal emergency response service (such as LifeLine) to help you if you fall again.

Have you stopped doing any daily activities because you are afraid of falling? Do you avoid exercise because you are afraid of falling?

YES

NO

Yes: Fear of falling can be helpful if it causes you to take reasonable precautions, but it can be harmful when it causes you to avoid exercise and other daily activities that keep you active, strong and healthy. Start slowly to build your confidence in exercise and daily activities. Start with chair exercises, then move to standing exercises, and then moving exercises. If you are afraid of exercising alone, consider joining a group or class.



Has your hand strength decreased?

YES

NO

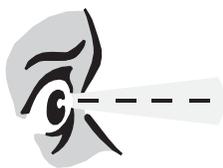
Yes: Decreased hand strength can put you at greater risk for falling because you may have difficulty catching yourself or carrying objects safely. Avoid carrying things in your hands when walking. Put them in a pocket or purse instead. You may benefit from strength training for your hands. Talk to your health care provider about recommended exercises.

Has your eyesight diminished? Do you have trouble seeing depth or seeing at night?

YES

NO

Yes: Problems with eyesight can make it difficult to see things you can trip over. Get your eyes tested by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist to see if you need glasses or a new prescription. Place nightlights throughout your house. For depth of field problems, place tape or paint a line at the edge of stairs so you can see the edge when walking.



Personal Risk Factors

(continued)



Have you experienced hearing loss?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Hearing is closely associated with balance. Get your hearing tested by your health care provider or by an audiologist. Wear a hearing aid as needed.

Do you have foot ulcers, bunions, hammer toes or calluses that hurt or cause you to adjust your steps?

- YES
 NO

Do you feel unsteady on your feet? Do you shuffle when you walk?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Painful foot problems can cause you to walk slowly and differently, increasing your chance of falling. If you have reduced feeling in your feet, make sure to watch your step and be aware of foot placement. Attend a foot care clinic or ask your doctor to treat your feet problems. A strong stride and good balance are key to preventing falls. Consider using a cane or other assistive device to help you feel steadier. Your doctor can help you decide which device is best for you. Carry a cordless phone with you so you don't have to rush to answer the phone and so you can call for help if you do have a fall. You can also ask your doctor to give you a balance assessment or recommend physical therapy.



Do you feel weaker than you used to? Do you have less strength in your arms and legs?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Arm and leg weakness can make it harder for you to navigate your environment. You can build muscle strength by exercising regularly. Join an exercise class or learn exercises that you can do at home.

Do you experience incontinence?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Incontinence can increase your chances of falling if you are anxious and rush to get to the bathroom. Check with your doctor about incontinence treatments. If nighttime incontinence is an issue, consider getting a bedside commode. Make sure the path to your bathroom is well lit and free from clutter.

Do you feel dizzy when you stand up?

- YES
 NO

Yes: Dizziness increases your chance of falling because it causes disorientation and even fainting. Dizziness can have many causes so you should ask your doctor to test you for postural hypotension (decreased blood pressure). Take time to stabilize yourself before changing positions.

Personal Risk Factors

(continued)



Do you take four or more medications? Do you take high blood pressure medications?

YES
 NO

Yes: Certain medications can increase your chance of falling because of side effects such as dizziness, confusion and low blood pressure. Have your doctor or pharmacist review all of your medications and dosages. Make sure you understand the medications you are on and how to take them correctly.

Do you take sleeping pills regularly?

YES
 NO

Yes: Sleeping pills can cause dizziness, confusion and a “hang-over” feeling that increase your chance of falling. Meet with your doctor to discuss sleeping tips. Avoid drinking alcohol while taking sleeping pills.

Do you ever wear high heels?

YES
 NO

Yes: High heels are more likely to get caught in the carpet and in holes. They are also unsteady. Well-fitting shoes with low, flat, and wide heels provide the sturdiest footing.



Do your clothes (dresses, robes, etc) have long cords or ties?

YES
 NO

Yes: Shorten ties and cords to prevent tripping on them.

Do you ever wear socks only? Or slippers without rubber soles?

YES
 NO

Yes: Shoes should also have non-skid soles. Slippers and socks with rubber tread bottoms are more likely to prevent slipping.



Do you wear athletic shoes?

YES
 NO

Yes: Avoid wearing athletic shoes with large soles and deep treads in the soles.

Who Can Help?



Do you have questions about fall prevention in your home? Do you know where to turn for information about improving your health and safety?

Check with your doctor or HMO, and your city or county public health department. On the Web, look up:

Minnesota Safety Council (interactive fall prevention checklist) at <http://www.mnsafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/falls/>
“Fall Prevention Home Safety Checklist” (PDF) at <http://www.mnsafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/fallcheck.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/spotlite/falls.htm>
and <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/falls/default.htm>

“The Practical Guide to Universal Home Design” at Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (info on home accessibility remodeling design and funding) at <http://mhfa.state.mn.us/accessibility>

Sources:

Senior Fall Prevention Task Force, Hennepin County Community Health Department,
"Fall Prevention Home Safety Checklist" from **Senior Fall Prevention Screening Kit:
Identifying fall risk factors in older adults**

Minnesota Safety Council

Consumer Product Safety Commission

Centers for Disease Control

East Metro SAIL (Seniors Agenda for Independent Living)

Minnesota Safety Council 2004



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