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FALLS AND OLDER ADULTS: DO HOME MODIFICATIONS NOW

Researchers have found that 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. It makes sense, then, to make changes to existing homes, or build in features in new construction that will help create a safer environment. Experts say that changes to a home should improve accessibility and adaptability, and incorporate features of universal design.

Perhaps you're thinking, "This doesn't apply to me. I'll worry about that later." You could be right. You might not be at risk for a fall. But it's easier to make some of these changes now, before you have to. And here are some other reasons why these ideas make sense right now.

The host with the most: Clearing clutter, adding lights, making switches more visible, adding railings and grab bars - all of these things make your home more welcoming to visitors. Visitors of any age can slip and fall in unfamiliar surroundings. By fall-proofing your home, you are being a good host.

It's a bug: Everyone gets an occasional cold or flu. Even a little bug can make you more susceptible to falls. When you're sick, you can be tired or feverish. You might be getting up out of bed more often, or be stiff and achy.

Return on investment: Home safety improvements add value to your home, and fall-proofing your home makes it easier to sell. Universal Home Design concepts make any home friendlier to children, older homeowners or anyone with a disability.

While you're at it: If you're having some work done on your home, think about adding some of these improvements to the project already planned or underway. A lot of builders already incorporate the techniques in new construction. But applying them to any home improvement project is more and more common. Talk to a contractor who's familiar with the principles of Universal Home Design, and ask how it can improve the look and livability of your home. While the contractor is around, it might cost less and be less disruptive.

Resources:

- Minnesota Safety Council (interactive fall prevention checklist) at <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/falls/>
- Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.html>
- Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (info on home accessibility remodeling design and funding) at <http://www.mnhousing.gov>



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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? Many organizations want to help:

- Your health care provider: Many HMOs have 24-hour help lines. Or try your doctor or clinic.
- City or county public health department.

On the web:

- Minnesota Safety Council (<http://minnesotasafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe>)
- Centers for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov>)
- Administration on Aging (<http://www.aoa.gov/>)
- AARP (<http://www.aarp.org/>)



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