

Preventing Falls in the Home

There are many things to help prevent falls in the home. This guide can assist in identifying potential risk factors and provide useful suggestions.

Environmental Risk Factors

- Hazardous activity (working around machinery, livestock, grain bins)
- Time of day (such as dawn, night time)
- Lighting (such as poor lighting)
- Clutter (in the home, barn, shed, vehicles)
- Loose cords
- Rugs
- Pets or live stock

Personal Risk Factors

- Decreased muscle strength
- Poor balance or coordination (such as poor gait, sit-to-stand dizziness)
- Visual disturbances (such as blurred, double, halos)
- Mental status changes (such as confusion, impaired judgment, anxiety)
- Dizziness or vertigo
- Incontinence (bladder and bowel)
- Use of multiple prescribed and over-the-counter medications
- Aging process
- Existing medical conditions (such as arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, asthma)
- Experiencing pain

Tips to help reduce the risk of falling at home

Check all stairs

- Repair any worn carpet or broken steps and railings.
- Install railing as needed and if possible.
- Pick up and put away books, magazines, and other stuff that may be piled on the steps.

Provide adequate lighting

- Consider installing night lights or higher wattage bulbs.
- Make sure you can reach a light from bed. Always turn lights on when getting in or out of bed. If not possible, use an inexpensive remote control to turn lights on and off from across the room.
- Add lights where overhead lighting is lacking.
- Consider adding bright strips of tape to each step to increase visibility.
- Keep a charged flashlight near the bedside for emergencies.

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Eliminate all possible risk factors

- Remove unnecessary items from the floor.
- Keep walkways or pathways inside or outside the home clear.
- Remove throw rugs or fasten with adhesive to floor.
- Keep pets in an enclosed area or clear from walking paths/areas.

Put regularly used items within reach

- Keep items within easy reach between hip and eye level.
- Organize space to minimize stooping or reaching (consider using a long- handled grasper or long-handled reaching tool).
- Use a sturdy step stool, if reaching overhead is needed.

Keep floors dry

- Wipe up all spills immediately.

Bathroom or bathtub safety

- Use non-skid bathtub or shower mat.
- Sit and use a non-skid shower chair and hand-held shower head.
- Install grab bars or handrails in shower where necessary.
- Keep or bring a portable phone in the bathroom to use in case of a fall.

Appropriate furniture

- Use sturdy furniture with strong back supports.
- Use arm rests for support while getting in and out of chairs.
- Avoid chairs on coasters/wheels.

Keep telephone accessible

- Keep telephone in easy to reach areas in case of emergencies.
- Keep emergency telephone numbers readily available.

For overall health and safety

- Review your medical condition regularly with your health care provider.
- Have regular check-ups as needed (such as vision and hearing).
- Keep a current record of all medications.
- Recognize your abilities and limitations.
- When encountering a new environment, assess potential risk factors and identify necessary safety measures.

Consider an emergency call system

There are two general types available. In both cases the farmer or rancher wears a pendent with a small button which is pressed in the event of an emergency.

Direct help system

When the button is pressed you are connected directly to an operator who has information specific to your personal medical condition and needs. (There is a monthly fee based on the extent of services.)

In-direct help system

When the button is pressed a recorded message is sent to pre-determined numbers of friends or relatives. The person receiving the call then takes the necessary steps needed to get help. (This system has a one-time charge.)

References:

Palo Alto Medical Foundation Patient Health Information
Alterra Home Safety and Fall Prevention
TSAO Foundation
NCPS Fall Prevention and Management