

HOME SAFETY TIPS (Jennifer Buckley, www.caregiver.org)

You feel safe and secure with your loved one watching television close by in the next room. On a daily basis, you meticulously monitor their diet, hygiene and warnings on their over-the-counter and prescription medication. Nothing has been left to chance, so you think. What about making your home safe from injuries? Hidden dangers in the home can cause your loved one to have a terrible fall but it can be avoided.

According to the Brain Injury Association, 60% of fatal falls occur in the home and one out of every three seniors fall at least once. The statistic is high but prevention is attainable with some simple modifications. Andrea Tannenbaum, president of Dynamic Living Inc., an on-line Internet catalog featuring home safety products, recommends performing a home safety check. Ms. Tannenbaum believes it's the first step in preventing a terrible fall. The home safety check should consist of the following questions:

1. Is the lighting near stairways, hallways and doorways adequate?
2. Are the light switches easy to turn on and off?
3. Is there a telephone and lamp on the nightstand?
4. Is there a night light in the bathroom?
5. Is all clutter picked up off the floor, especially around pathways?
6. Are there any broken floorboards, tears in the linoleum, carpet or abrupt changes in the flooring, such as thresholds that could cause tripping?
7. Is there a tub or shower seat in the bathroom area?

8. Are there sturdy grab bars where falls most frequently occur: by stairs, by the bathtub or by the toilet?
9. Are throw rugs secured to the floor?
10. Does the bathroom/shower have non-skid flooring?

After the safety check is complete, it is time to evaluate what changes need to be made to ensure the safety of your loved one but, just be sure to follow through on making the necessary adjustments. According to Ms. Tannenbaum, most of the modifications we recommend, do not involve substantial lifestyle changes or great sums of money, but they do have an enormous impact on preventing accidents. Dynamic Living Inc. offers various products including: mobility items to hearing and memory loss items that will keep your loved one safe and comfortable in the home.

Grip bars are especially useful in preventing slip and falls and you can place them almost anywhere. Some don't even require wall mounting and are very sturdy. For instance, the SuperPole is a floor-to-ceiling tension pole that is easily installed. It can help your loved one get out of bed, sit down in a chair or get out of the shower. It acts as a point of balance and support and it doesn't need a wall for mounting. The company also recommends the smart roll, which attaches to a bed frame or the advantage rail which is a floor mounted support bar that moves with your loved one. For the bathtub, the Dynamic Living has the tri-grip bar that has three textured gripping areas to make it easier for your loved one to get in and out of the tub. Aside from grips aiding in mobility, lighting is also an important element in safety.

Unlit areas can cause potentially hazardous situations. According to Ms. Tannenbaum, because of the age-related changes in vision, more lighting is needed to do familiar tasks. It also takes longer for the eyes to focus when there are changes in lighting. Even changing the strength of a light bulb can

improve on safety in the home. Dynamic Living offers a voice-activated light switch called MotionPad that can even activate fans and radios. Additional safety tools the company offers are, a personal paging system and personal emergency response system.

The personal paging system is a small portable pager useful within the home to alert a caregiver or family member when they are needed. The personal emergency response system presents a 24- hour monitoring center contacted when your loved one wears a special bracelet or pendant equipped with an emergency button.

The cost of these home modifications is moderate and the tools are very effective in preventing home injuries. Therefore, the investment is an investment in safety.