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Easy Modifications Can Prevent Slips in the Home

Every year, about one-third of individuals 65-plus will fall, and some will be disabled by the broken bones that can follow, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

In many cases, the group points out, a fall can be precipitated by medications such as sedatives, muscle relaxants and blood-pressure drugs that can cause dizziness, lightheadedness or loss of balance.

When medications are combined, these side effects may be aggravated. Falls also result from diminished vision, hearing, muscle strength, coordination and reflexes.

To help older homeowners avoid falls, osteoporosis experts offer the following home-safety checklist:

Lighting

- Use night lights in hallways, bathrooms and bedrooms.
- Make sure hallways, stairs and all rooms are well lighted.

Floors

- Remove throw rugs or use non-slip backing.
- Tack down carpet edges.
- Use non-skid wax on floors.
- Make sure electrical cords are out of the line of traffic.
- Keep furniture in its usual place.

Stairs

- Install light switches at both the top and bottom of stairs.
- Cover stairs with non-slip surface.
- Install handrails on both sides.
- Repair all loose stairway rugs.
- Never leave objects on the stairs.

Living areas

- Keep pathways clear of furniture, plants, electrical cords and anything else that might trip you.

Kitchen

- Keep items within easy reach.
- Keep a sturdy stool handy for reaching items on top shelves. (Better yet, ask someone else to help you.)

Bathroom

- Install handrails beside tub, shower and toilet.
- Use a mat or decals in tub.
- Install a night light.
- Place a non-corrosive seat in the tub for worry-free bathing.
- Install a handheld showerhead with an on/off button to make it easier to sit in the shower.
- Install lifted toilet seats.

Bedroom

- Keep a flashlight by your bed.
- Keep floor clear of clutter.
- Make sure the route to the bathroom is clear and well lighted.

Additional safety tips to help people avoid falls:

- Exercise regularly to build strength and improve your balance and coordination.
- Don't rush. Rise slowly from a chair, sit on the edge of your bed a moment before you stand, stand and get your balance before walking.
- Look out for your eyes; see an eye specialist annually.
- Wipe up all spills immediately.
- Make sure your shoes are sturdy and well fitted with non-slip soles. Low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles are safer than high heels, thick-soled athletic shoes, slippers or stocking feet.