

PREVENTING FALLS IN THE HOME

One out of three senior citizens suffers a fall each year. Falls are the most frequent factor in hospitalization admissions for the elderly in Texas. Forty per cent of all nursing home admissions are related to falls.

The effects of falling can also be emotionally debilitating, creating fears about walking or leaving the house. Fear of falling can severely impair independent living, as well as social functioning.

The two most common areas in the home where injuries occur are the bathroom and kitchen. Taking a few precautions, though, can help the elderly avoid many of these accidents, according to Nancy Crowe, a physical therapist and chief operating officer for the Visiting Nurse Association.

Nancy offers the following 10 tips for preventing falls in the home:

- Use non-slip mats or apply textured strips in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Install grab bars next to the toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Immediately clean up spilled liquids and food from kitchen floors.
- Do not stand on chairs, boxes, or other makeshift items to reach high shelves or to replace light bulbs. Use a stepstool with a handrail.
- Avoid placing small throw rugs on hard wood, linoleum, and tile floors, or apply rubber matting or double-faced adhesive tape to the backs of the rugs.
- Do not rush to answer the door or phone.
- Check lighting on stairs to make sure each step is well lit and that the edge of the steps is clearly visible when going up and down. All staircases should have lights and handrails.
- Make sure hallways and passageways between rooms are well lit and uncluttered.
- Use nightlights to illuminate hallways and rooms.
- Keep a flashlight near the bed.

Family members can help reduce the risks of an elderly relative falling at home by becoming aware of these and other possible hazards, and helping correct them.

It is also important to make sure that phone numbers of the police and fire departments are readily available, along with a neighbor's number. At least one phone at home should be easily

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accessible in the event that a person falls and is unable to stand.

“Most of the factors involved in home falls can be fixed, provided you are aware of potential dangers,” Nancy states. “By making just a few modifications and taking some precautions, it is possible to minimize injuries in the home,” she adds.

The Visiting Nurse Association has joined with other health and wellness providers as part of the Texas Falls Prevention Coalition, created in 2007 by the Texas Association of Area Agencies on Aging. The group’s mission is to “Promote, implement and evaluate evidence-based programs and policies that help reduce risk factors of falls and injuries in older adults; provide education and resources to increase public awareness, mobilize communities and effect policy change for a falls-free Texas.”

The Texas Falls Prevention Coalition is working to establish a statewide network to share information, identify needs in fall prevention services and resources, and advocate for policies that support fall prevention.

As part of this effort to reduce falls by the elderly, physical therapists with the Visiting Nurse Association make assessments and recommendations about safety hazards when they visit the homes of patients. It’s an important part of VNA’s mission to provide the care that makes it possible for the elderly to continue to live independently in the safety and comfort of their homes.

Additional information about VNA rehabilitation therapies and other home care services can be obtained by calling Elaine Harrison, R.N., at (972) 533-4676 or going online at www.vnatexas.org.



Nancy Crowe, physical therapist and chief operating officer for the Visiting Nurse Association, performs a safety assessment in the home of a patient.

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