



Handle With Care: A Checklist to Help Older Adults Reduce Falls Risk

Gina Peek

Assistant Professor and Extension Housing and Consumer Specialist Department of Design, Housing and Merchandising

Alex Bishop

Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Science

Reduce Risk of Accidental Injury in the Home!

The risk of falling increases with age. Among older adults, falls cause the most fractures, hospital trauma admissions and injury-related deaths (National Institutes of Health, n.d.). Falls can result in major medical expenses, including trips to the emergency room, extended hospital stays or long-term care. For example, the average cost of hospital care resulting from a fall is \$17,086.

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)

Falls can also lower quality of life. For example, a fall might result in a fractured hip. A fractured hip will greatly reduce mobility.

Falls Can Cause Health Problems

Many older adults who fall down are unable able to get back up. Staying on the floor for a few hours after a fall can result in minor injury or acute illness. For example, an older adult who has fallen may suffer from dehydration and lowered body temperature (Merck and Co., 2014).

Many falls result in injury (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Some falls require a visit to the emergency room, hospital stay or entry into a nursing home. Injuries can include:

- Scrapes, cuts and bruising: Face, arms, legs or buttocks
- Fractures: Hip/pelvis, ribs, spine, leg, ankle, forearm/upper arm and hand(s)
- Head injury: Concussion and traumatic brain injuries

People who have fallen are sometimes fearful of falling again. Nearly half of these older adults avoid normal everyday activities, such as walking and cleaning (Merck and Co., 2014). Limited movement can lead to stiff joints, weak muscles and poor balance. As a result, the risk of falling increases.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets are also available on our website at:
<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

Some Physical Activity

Helps Prevent Falls

Exercise prevents falls. Older adults should have two hours and 30 minutes of exercise each week (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). This can improve balance and strength. Some things to do include:

- Walking
- Standing on one leg
- Going from seated to standing sitting several times in a row
- Using resistance bands to improve arm and leg strength
- Participating in yoga or Tai Chi classes

The National Institute on Aging (2014) provides exercises that can easily be done at home. Visit the following publication for information: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/sites/default/files/exercise-guide.pdf>. Always consult your physician before starting any moderate to vigorous exercise routine.

No-Cost Steps to Reduce Falls Risk

Make your home safer in a few easy steps!

Your home environment plays an important role in your health, safety and welfare. Consider asking a family member or friend to help assess your home for safety. There are many no-cost and/or low-cost steps that you can take to lower the risk of falling at home. Remember... You can help control your home environment to prevent falls!

Clutter and furnishings inside your home can make you trip and fall. Too much stuff? Do you have to navigate around furniture? Are your closets bursting with items that topple out when you open the door? If yes, the contents of your home interfere with your well-being. Getting rid of belongings can be hard. Have a friend help you, if possible. Reducing clutter can reduce risks of a fall.

	I have done this	I need to do this	This does not apply to me
Are your floors cluttered?			
Remove small throw rugs			
Stop unwanted junk mail from stacking up: Visit the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information website at http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/ to learn how to remove your name off unwanted mailing lists			
Recycle newspapers, magazines and other papers when finished with them			
Keep floors tidy and clutter-free			
Keep frequently used items off the floor and within easy, low-to-reach areas			
Use a step stool with a grab bar when accessing items in closets or on overhead shelves			
Avoid using a chair as a ladder or step stool			
Consider recycling newspapers and magazines			
Is your home crowded with furniture?			
Create at least a 32-inch clearance between furniture and seating areas			
Place the coffee table 18 inches from sofas, recliners or other seating areas			
Do you have to walk over electrical cords?			
Run cords along walls			
Consider having an electrician install new outlets			

The areas outside of your home affect your well-being and can prevent safe entry. Do you have broken, splintered, or rotting stairs? Are the stairs nice and straight or uneven?

Do your railings wobble when you grab them? Consider the walkways, paths and steps leading to your home. A safe entryway can reduce falls risk. Get help with the following, if you can't do it yourself.

	I have done this	I need to do this	This does not apply to me
Can people find your home in an emergency situation?			
Make sure the address is clearly marked on your home and/or mailbox			
Make sure the doorbell/knocker works			
Do you have safe stairways?			
Repair any loose or broken stairs			
Use a level to check for levelness			
Repair any loose railings			
Remove ice and snow from steps and sidewalks			
Do you have safe walkways?			
Repair cracks in concrete			

Older adults need more lighting. Do you have shadowy staircases? Do you navigate down a dark hall to get from the bedroom to the bathroom? Is the entrance to your home dark at night? If yes, the lighting in your home affects your

well-being. Consider the lighting both inside and outside of your home. Good lighting in key locations can reduce risks of a fall.

	I have done this	I need to do this	This does not apply to me
Is your lighting good enough?			
Use a nightlight between the bedroom and the bathroom			
Place a lamp next to the bed; consider having a lamp on each side of the bed			
Avoid dark areas: Create an even wash of light outside of your home			
Make certain that there is good lighting in stairways			
Keep a flashlight handy in case the power goes out in your home			
Install light switches at the top and bottom of the steps			
Make certain the sidewalk or pathway leading to your home is well lit			
Replace light bulbs as they burn out			

Clothes and shoes that do not fit can get tangled, stepped on or caught on furnishings can make you lose your balance, resulting in a fall. Do your pants sweep the floor? Are your shoes too tight or loose on your feet? Do your sleeves

dangle over the stove as you are cooking? If yes, then your clothes affect your well-being. Make sure clothing and shoes fit well and are properly styled to avoid catching. Properly fitting clothing and shoes can reduce risks of a fall.

	I have done this	I need to do this	This does not apply to me
Does your clothing fit properly?			
Wear pants that don't drag on the ground (pants should be at least one-half inch off of the ground)			
Wear close-fitting garments; avoiding drapey, big or bulky clothes. They might get caught on furniture or other things and cause a fall			
Is your footwear appropriate?			
Avoid walking barefoot			
Wear shoes that fit (not too big or too small)			
Wear flat-heeled shoes that support the ankle			
Wear shoes with traction while walking outdoors			
Wear non-skid slippers			

The way in which you perform daily activities can help or hinder you. Do you carry too much stuff, feel unbalanced while walking or rush from place to place? Do you use

a device to help you move around, and if so, do you leave it in the closet? Consider your safety as you go about your activities. Best practices can help you reduce risks of a fall.

<i>Do you use best practices?</i>	I have done this	I need to do this	This does not apply to me
Install a package shelf next to the door; it provides a place to set belongings down while you open the door			
Take your time when walking from one place to the next			
Watch your step when walking up and down a step or curb			
Visit the eye doctor for a yearly vision exam			
Ask a doctor or physical therapist to help select the correct cane, wheeled walker or other device			
Keep a phone by the bed			
Use grab bars in the bathroom; if you don't have grab bars, get them installed next to the toilet and in the shower: Place grab bars 33 inches to 36 inches above the floor			

Other Information

For information on free home safety and repair services, contact the Oklahoma State Division of Aging by dialing 211. You'll be connected to your local Area Agency on Aging.

Reviewers

Lani Vasconcellos, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
 Sonya McDaniel, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
 Connie Johnson, Consumer, member Oklahoma Home and Community Education (OHCE)
 Greg Sanders, North Dakota State University

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 0915 GH.