

## Health Corner

Health Corner will be a few paragraphs each quarter with tips to increase awareness in health and well being of Family of GCBC. This quarter's topic is part 1 of a two part series and will cover Home Safety, more specifically, "Falls Prevention." The home safety checklist that follows was taken from the American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons.

### **Home Safety Checklist: Prevent Falls! (Part 1)**

Falls are the leading cause of injuries to older people in the U.S. Each year, more than 11 million senior citizens fall--that's one of every three people over 65. Treatment of the injuries and complications associated with falls costs the U.S. more than \$20.2 billion annually. The number of falls and the severity of injury increase with age. While some risk factors for falls, such as heredity and age, cannot be changed, several risk factors can be eliminated or reduced. Most falls occur at home and most fractures result from a fall at home. Falls can lead to a tragic loss of older people's independence and mobility. Simple modifications to the interior of your house can cut by one-half your risk of falling. Where necessary, install safety devices. Each year, more than 734,000 people over 65 are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with stairs, bathtubs, furniture, carpeting and other products seniors live with and use every day. Thousands of these injuries are related to falls: 3,000 seniors each year fall while standing on chairs; 6,800 seniors trip on rugs or carpet runners. Many of these accidents could be prevented. Changes in furniture arrangement, housekeeping and lighting will help reduce your risk of falling at home. Use this checklist as a guide.

**Falls can occur anytime, anyplace and to anyone while doing everyday activities such as climbing stairs or getting out of the bathtub. Research shows that simple safety modifications at home-where 60 percent of seniors' falls occur-can substantially cut the risk of falling. Protect yourself with these simple changes in furniture arrangement, housekeeping and lighting to prevent falls.**

#### **Stairs and steps**

- Make sure light switches are at both the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Provide enough light to see each step and the top and bottom landings.
- Keep flashlights nearby in case of a power outage.
- Install handrails on both sides of the stairway and be sure to use them.
- Do not leave objects on the stairs.
- Consider installing motion detector lights that turn on automatically and light your stairway.
- Put nonskid treads on each bare-wood step.
- Do not use patterned, dark or deep-pile carpeting. Solid colors show the edges of steps more clearly.
- Do not place loose area rugs at the bottom or top of stairs.
- Repair loose stairway carpeting or boards immediately.

#### **Bathroom**

- Install grab bars on the bathroom walls near the toilet and along the bathtub or shower.
- Place a slip-resistant rug adjacent to the bathtub for safe exit and entry.
- Mount a liquid soap dispenser on the bathtub/shower wall.
- Place nonskid adhesive textured strips on the bathtub/shower floor.
- Use a sturdy, plastic seat in the bathtub if you are unsteady or if you cannot lower yourself to the floor of the tub.
- Stabilize yourself on the toilet by using either a raised seat or a special toilet seat with armrests.
- Replace glass shower enclosures with non-shattering material.

## **Bedroom**

Clear clutter from the floor.  
Place a lamp and flashlight near your bed.  
Install night-lights along the route between the bedroom and the bathroom.  
Sleep on a bed that is easy to get into and out of.  
Keep a telephone near your bed.

## **Living Areas**

Arrange furniture to create clear pathways between rooms.  
Remove low coffee tables, magazine racks, footrests and plants from pathways in rooms.  
Install easy-access light switches at entrances to rooms so you won't have to walk into a darkened room in order to turn on the light. Glow-in-the-dark switches may be helpful.  
Secure loose area rugs with double-faced tape or slip-resistant backing. Recheck these rugs periodically.  
Keep electric, appliance and telephone cords out of your pathways, but don't put cords under a rug.  
Eliminate wobbly chairs, ladders and tables.  
Do not sit in a chair or on a sofa that is so low it is difficult to stand up.  
Place carpeting over concrete, ceramic and marble floors to lessen the severity of injury, if you fall.  
Repair loose wooden floorboards immediately.

## **Kitchen**

Remove throw rugs.  
Immediately clean up any liquid, grease or food spilled on the floor.  
Store food, dishes and cooking equipment at easy-to-reach waist-high level.  
Don't stand on chairs or boxes to reach upper cabinets. Use only a step stool with an attached handrail so you are supported.  
Repair loose flooring.  
Use nonskid floor wax.

## **Take Care of YOU!!! Prevent Falls! (Part II)**

Get an annual physical and eye examination, particularly an evaluation of cardiac and blood pressure problems.  
Maintain a diet with adequate dietary calcium and vitamin D.  
Participate in an exercise program for agility, strength, balance and coordination.  
Eliminate all tripping hazards in your home and install grab bars, handrails and other safety devices.  
Wear properly-fitting shoes with nonskid soles.  
Tie your shoe laces.  
Replace slippers that have stretched out of shape and are too loose.  
Use a long-handled shoehorn if you have trouble putting on your shoes.  
Avoid high heels and shoes with smooth, slick soles.  
Do not smoke.  
Avoid excessive alcohol intake.  
Keep an up-to-date list of all medications and provide it to all doctors with whom you consult.  
Check with your doctor(s) about the side effects of your medicines and over-the-counter drugs. Fatigue or confusion increases your risk of falling.  
Make sure all medications are clearly labeled and stored in a well-lit area according to instructions.  
Take medications on schedule with a full glass of water, unless otherwise instructed.  
Never walk in your stocking feet.  
Women who cannot find wide-enough athletic shoes for proper fit should shop in the men's shoe department because men's shoes are made wider.

### **What are the medical risk factors for a fall?**

Impaired musculoskeletal function, gait abnormality, osteoporosis.  
Cardiac arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat), blood pressure fluctuation.  
Depression, Alzheimer's disease and senility.  
Arthritis, hip weakness or imbalance.  
Neurologic conditions, stroke, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis.

Urinary and bladder dysfunction.

Vision or hearing loss.

Cancer that affects bones.

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