



Spring is great time to fall-proof your home

By Mary Jo Jeffrey, Director of Physical Therapy, Lincoln Hospital

Each year, the doctors at the Lincoln Hospital Emergency Room Treat dozens of breaks, sprains and abrasions from falls, both in and out of the home. Falls can be a major hazard for all age groups, but seniors and children often have the most serious injuries. The solution to falling is to be aware, and to keep harm out of your way.

The first thing to consider when making your home fall-proof, is the lighting. Poor visibility is the cause of many falls, so always turn lights on before entering a room and be sure to replace burned-out bulbs quickly. Night-lights for hallways, bathrooms and bedrooms are a must, and for outdoors, sensor devices to automatically turn lights on at dusk are a big safety plus.

Make sure walkways are secure by pickup up toys, shoes, electrical and phone cords with often impede the most traveled portions of your home. Carpeting should be securely fastened, and avoid purchasing throw rugs that can slide or bunch up. Throw rugs with skid resistant backing need regular vacuuming on both sides. Dirt build-up will cause a non-skid rug to stop gripping the floor. It's also a good idea to clean up spills immediately.

For those like me who find stairs an easy place to trip or slip, placing bright, contrasting colored tape on the top and bottom steps is a great signal. The top and bottom steps are the easiest to miss, and might cause a tumble.

One of the most basic ways to prevent falls is to purchase good shoes. Look for soles that grip, not slide, and make sure they have good support as well as traction. Slippers, too, with gripping soles are safer than smooth soles or socks, which have a tendency to slide unexpectedly.

Probably the most dangerous place in the home to fall is in the bathtub. To protect yourself, add grab bars, non-slip strips and bathmats. They are very cost effective. Even if you have non-slip mats, it's a wise idea to never step into a wet or full tub as it's very easy to lose footing. We recommend sitting on the side of the tub and lifting legs into the water. When climbing out, it's best to have something to hold onto, and make sure one foot is securely on the floor and that you are balanced before stepping out.

While in the shower, use of a flexible, hand-held shower can make bathing easier and prevent the need for standing, leaning backwards and turning around – all times when it's easy to lose your balance. As an extra precaution, dry your feet before getting out of the tub.

And finally, the cheapest, most effective way to prevent falls, is to be alert. Take stock of new rooms or places before walking right in. Let the phone ring a few times instead of running to answer it. Walk carefully so that you can feel the type of surface you're on, especially if it's icy, muddy or uneven, and never climb on a chair to reach something in a high spot. By being alert, you can be the best fall prevention tool in your household.

Mary Jo Jeffrey is the director of Physical Therapy at Lincoln Hospital. Services of Physical Therapy are not only available to residents of Lincoln Long Term Care, Lincoln Hospital and Transitional Care,, but to anyone under a doctor's care. For information on Physical Therapy, call (509) 725-2976.

