

ADVICE AND TIPS TO PREVENT FALLS AS THE WINTER SEASON APPROACHES

Below are simple steps YOU can take to make a big impact on preventing falls for older adults and adults with disabilities in your home and your community.

TIPS FOR WALKING

- Inspect outsoles on your shoes and boots for excessive wear. Replace badly worn footwear.
- Boots with deep cleats are best when walking on snow. If ice is expected, use ice cleats or Yaktrax that fit over your shoes/boots to provide increased traction on ice. Be sure to remove them once you are indoors, as they can be slippery on hard surfaced flooring or catch on carpet.
- Consider an ice gripper for your cane or use hiking poles with rubber tips that can be removed to leave an ice tip on the bottom for use in icy conditions.
- Keep walking paths clear of snow and ice. Be aware and be cautious. Walk as though snow and ice are present, i.e. upright posture, weight above knees, short strides, flat-footed gait (think marching band).
- Take slower smaller steps, especially when turning. Understand that activities such as crossing streets will take longer.
- Wear gloves to keep hands free (not in your pockets) to help balance yourself.
- Consider a backpack, an over-the-shoulder strapped bag, or a suitcase/cart with wheels to carry items. Besides keeping your hands free for balance assistance, your vision will not be obstructed.
- When you have a choice, travel on pathways that are in direct sunlight since they are often less icy. Be aware that sunlight causes melting and refreeze (black ice) should be expected.
- If snow and ice cannot be removed from a particular area, spread ice melt or sand or to improve traction. Oil absorbent and paver base are great alternatives to sand.
- Carry a zip plastic bag in your pocket filled with kitty litter to spread out ahead of your path if there is an unavoidable icy area.
- If a sidewalk is icy, consider walking on the ground next to it. Be alert for holes/uneven surfaces though.
- Wear brightly colored clothing so you are more visible to motorists. Consider applying reflective tape on your outdoor clothing and cane or walker. Shorter days mean more time in the dark.

TIPS FOR CAR TRAVEL

- Take great care getting in and out of a vehicle. Try to keep three points of contact when getting in and out of a vehicle: both feet and a hand or two hands and a foot. Reach back into vehicle to grab personal items after you are standing safely outside.
- When getting out of the vehicle, remember your shoe outsoles are warm and tend to create a zero traction moisture layer when stepping onto packed snow or ice.
- Consider an assistive device to help your transition to/from your vehicle. These “car canes” drop into the latch on the door pillar, offering a secure handle for balance assistance and weight transfer.

HEALTH TIPS

- Get your vitamin D. Vitamin D is linked to muscle strength, improves balance, and is a supplement known to reduce falls. Many physicians recommend taking vitamin D supplements year round to make sure they get the proper amount of the daily suggested adult requirement. (800-1000 IU)
- Sunlight provides vitamin D, however if you live in the northern two thirds of the United States, the sun is too far away during the cold season to trigger your skin to make vitamin D.
- Have your vision checked. Prescriptions may need adjustments and eye problems can be detected. If you have new bifocals/progressive lenses, be aware that you will have an adjustment period for a few weeks. Remove them on stairs if that provides better clarity of stair treads.
- Have your medications reviewed by your pharmacist and get a good night sleep.

- Find a good balance and exercise program. Classes and instructors can be found at www.iowaaging.gov/falls-prevention.
- Geriatricians do not recommend use of Tylenol PM, Benadryl or other PM-type pain reliever at night. The evidence has shown to increase the risk of confusion and drowsiness related to falls.

HOME SAFETY

- Install grab bars in bathroom and handrails next to indoor steps and thresholds.
- Keep a thin, slip resistant mat next to tub to step onto when getting out.
- If you feel your tub or tile flooring is slippery, treatments are available to dramatically raise traction.
- Remove tripping hazards, such as throw rugs, cords and clothing.
- Increase lighting and install motion-activated night lights along the route you typically travel when getting out of bed.
- Install stair railings on both sides and set automatic lights over stairways and by outside entrances.
- Consider applying grit tape with a contrasting color near the edge of each stair tread. Options are also available for carpeted steps.
- Cover the entryways to the home and provide a table to set down bags while finding keys.
- Use mats with slip-resistant backings or lightly spray adhesive to mat backing.
- Be sure to only use approved step stools when getting items that are out of reach. Look for a Type 1 or 2 rating, large platform steps, slip resistant feet and be sure it has a high top rail for balance assistance.

Talk with your family members in taking simple steps to stay safe. We encourage adult children to give useful and lifesaving fall-proofing holiday gifts to parents. Falls are not just a “seniors” issue.

Please visit www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/ to watch the video clip “6 steps to reduce falls”, as well as, additional tips to help keep your family and community safe this holiday season.