

Fall Proof Your Home



Anyone can fall, but the risk of falling increases with age.

Falls are the leading cause of seniors' injuries and injury-related hospitalization in Canada. Every year, one in three seniors will experience a fall. According to the 2009 Smart Risk Report the direct cost of seniors' falls was \$9.9 million, or 80% of the total cost of seniors' injuries in 2004.

Since approximately 50% of all falls occur in and around the home, we must do everything we can to make sure that our homes are SAFE.

The majority of falls occur while we are performing our regular daily activities! Living at home safely may require making simple adaptations and/or changes in our behavior. Every change that we make to adapt our home can help keep us from falling and injury. It only takes a little bit of detective work to track down these changes. If you have a health problem or a disability, an occupational therapist can come into your home and help you identify ways to improve your environment.

Check out the poster and put your detective skills to work. Can you identify changes that should be made to this home to prevent a fall? Can you identify other changes that would make the home safer? How well did you do? Answers are below.

In the Kitchen

Rearrange your cupboards so the heaviest items are at waist level for easiest handling. Other frequently used items should be at arms reach.

Use a step stool with a bar if you need to reach something on a high shelf or use a reacher.

Wipe up spills immediately.

Use a non-skid floor wax.

Don't use scatter mats.

Keep floor clutter free.

Reduce Risks in the Bathroom

The bathroom is an area of the home where a large number of falls occur. It can be one of the most dangerous because it is often wet and soapy which makes it slippery. Follow these suggestions to help reduce your risk of falling.

Install grab bars in the tub/shower area. Ideally there should be 2 – one on the wall and one on the side of the tub. Make sure they are securely fastened. Towel racks are not to be used as grab bars!

If you find it difficult to sit in the tub or stand for a shower, consider a bath seat/chair and a hand held shower.

Use long handled sponge brushes/scrubbers so you don't have to bend over.

Use a full length rubber mat or abrasive strips in the tub.

Use a non-skid bath mat.

Wipe up any water which may have splashed or dripped on the floor.

Install a grab bar next to your toilet.

Use a raised toilet seat if you find it difficult to lower yourself onto the toilet. Use one with arms if you can't install a grab bar.

Remember to use proper lighting (bright and non-glaring) and a night-light so you don't trip during the night.

Stair Safety

The largest proportion of falls in the home involves stairs! Even as few as 2 steps can pose a hazard. The following are tips that will improve stair safety.

Don't rush up or down the stairs – this is the major cause of falls on the stairs. Always take your time.

Use a handrail. Ideally there should be a rail on both sides of the stairs. Handrails should extend the full length of the stairs and beyond. You should be able to encircle your thumb and fingers around it and not touch the wall. The height of a handrail should be between 35 ½" to 38". Always make sure that it is securely attached to the wall.

There should be a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. If another switch cannot be installed use a motion sensor light.

Stairs are not for storage! Keep the stairs as well as any landings clear of clutter.

Don't use scatter mats at the top or bottom of stairs.

Keep stairs in good repair. Stairs should be uniform in height -7" and treads should be 11" for comfort and safety.

Make sure that carpeted stair runners are securely fastened, smooth, and have no fraying/torn edges. Visually distracting runners which make it difficult to see the edges of steps should be removed.

Mark the edge of each step with a contrasting color so they can be clearly seen.

If you are carrying something (eg. laundry basket), make sure that your view is not obstructed and you are able to hold onto the handrail.

Remove reading glasses when using the stairs.

If you polish your stairs be sure to use a non-skid, non-glare wax.

Always wear proper footwear! Slippers and shoes should fit properly and have non-slip soles. Say "No" sock feet or knit slippers – they are a fall waiting to happen.

In the Bedroom

Have a lamp on a table beside your bed.

Have a phone on a table beside your bed.

Keep a working flashlight in your bedside table.

Keep floor and pathways clear.

Use a night light in case you need to get up during the night.

Nightwear should be easy to put on and remove and be of proper length so feet don't get caught and cause a fall.

Always sit on the side of your bed for a minute before you get up.

Tips Throughout the House

Proper lighting – you should be able to turn a light on or off when you enter or leave a room. Consider motion detector lights if you can't have additional switches installed. Use the highest wattage suggested.

Keep all pathways clutter free. Pick up books, newspapers, shoes, etc that might cause you to trip.

Arrange your furniture so you have a clear pathway for walking.

Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall. If you can, have an electrician install extra outlets in order to eliminate extension cords.

Don't use scatter mats. Make sure that all area rugs and runners have non-skid backing to prevent movement. Remove any rugs that won't lay flat or have turned up edges.

Know where your pet is – attach a bell to their collar so you'll know when they near you.

Sit on chairs/couches that have arms to assist you when sitting or standing up.

Use night lights in dark hallways – light sensitive ones which turn on when it gets dark so you don't have to remember to plug it in.

Have a phone on each level of your home. Use a cordless phone so it can "travel" with you around the house thereby preventing you from rushing to get the phone! If you don't have a cordless phone, call display or *69 will tell you who just called.

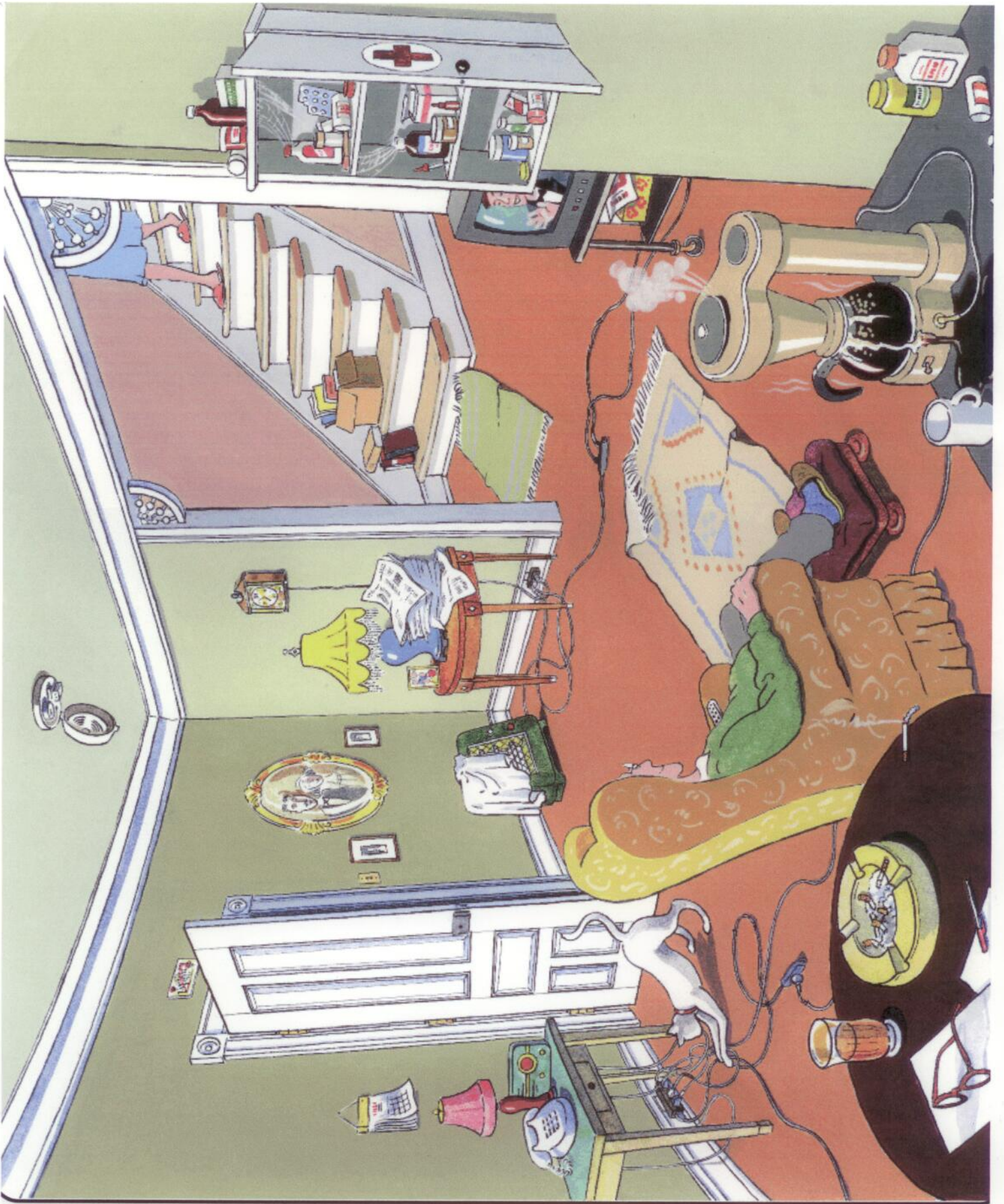
Have a chair or bench near an entrance to provide a safe place to remove or put on footwear.

Consider "Lifeline" if you live alone.

Practicing Falling

Sometimes no matter how careful you are, you may fall. Here are a few “tips” to practice falling at home. They may help you to develop “new instincts” and safer reflexes that may help you in some situations.

1. In backward and sideward falls, turn fingers in towards the body. Then the arms will bend with the fall rather than being locked in a position where they can't bend. Practice pointing your fingers towards your body as you sit down on a chair.
2. In a fall, try to “round” out your shape by removing angles and “go with the flow”. E.g. round your back, flex your knees and arms slightly, and gradually “roll” into a fall if you can. This technique spreads harmful forces over time and distance so that no single body part takes all the impact. Practice by standing with your back to the bed. Sit down and roll to your back in one smooth motion; rock smoothly back up to your feet.
3. In trips, flexible hips are really important in regaining balance. If you can't get your legs into position to balance you in time, go with the flow and try to lower yourself with your arms. Practice getting your hips to move fast in emergencies by taking giant steps one after the other, bringing the back leg up front quickly.
4. In backward falls, try to get your hands to hit the floor before your hips. Your arms will have to reach behind you in advance of your body ready to flex on contact. Practice by standing with your back to the bed. Reach your arms behind you and roll onto the bed.
5. If you are falling from a height, always try to land feet first then bend your knees and hips. Your hands and arms can help break the fall; than “round out” and roll to the side and onto your back to spread out the force.



Observations from Safety Poster

Fall Prevention

Stairs without handrail
Bell on cat
Loose rugs
Flip-flop slippers
Loose extension cords in traffic areas
Clutter on staircase
Cordless phone
Light switch at stairs
Remove scatter mat at bottom of stairs

Home Safety

Open bottles of medicine
Outdated medication
Newspapers too close to Lamp
Automatic shut-off on
No handle or deadbolt on door
Cigarettes unattended
Cloth on space heater
Overloaded outlets
Deactivated smoke alarm

Thank you to
Seniors Active Living Centre
for allowing us to use this
information.