

As seen in



December 23, 2011

Fall protection

'Senior proof' your home for holiday guests

This particular time of year, we embrace family, as winter celebrations offer us the opportunity to reconnect with loved ones. For many, this means opening our homes to family members, many of whom are older.

One false step down a staircase, around the corner of the hallway, or even in the shower has the potential to change the life of an elderly person forever.

Falls are the leading cause of death due to injury among seniors. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, elders have a one in three chance of experiencing a fall in any given year. More than 19,700 older adults died from unintentional fall injuries in 2008.

Falling among older adults is a serious public-health problem. The risk of hurting oneself upon falling increases with age, as reflexes slow, diminishing a person's ability to protect oneself. Bones are more brittle, making senior citizens more susceptible to breaking a wrist or even a hip. Unlike illnesses and diseases that take the lives of elderly people, falling is completely preventable.

If you're having senior relatives or friends visiting for the holidays, it's important to ensure your home is safe. Most falls occur in the home: around stairs, bathtubs, furniture and carpeting. The risk of a senior falling increases greatly in unfamiliar surroundings.

The first step should be to remove

all area rugs. Rugs are the leading causes of falls, and should be removed in order to accommodate an elderly guest.

Next, one must identify and move items in the home that could be hazardous. Remove all clutter from hallways, especially electrical cords. Move furniture away from high-traffic areas in your home, in order to provide your loved one with a large walkway, ensuring they will not trip.

Add extra lighting to areas he or she will be spending time in most. Dark hallways, kitchens and bathrooms are common places where falls occur. Place

a lamp next to the side of the bed. Make sure to install glow-in-the-dark light switches so your guest will be able to identify where the switches are even in the dark. Winter storms can cause power outages. Installing rechargeable flashlight nightlights in bedrooms and hallways will decrease accidents in an emergency.

Repair any loose carpeting or floorboards right away. If there is a place in your home where you trip or stub your toe, your elderly visitor is likely to do the same.

Ensure your guest room is adaptable to the needs of your guest. Place night tables and shelves in places easily accessible. Offer to help your loved one unpack, being sure to store clothing, medication and other necessities within reach.

Adding safety devices may be necessary. Consider installing nonslip

treads for wooden steps. Make sure handrails are easy to see in low light or at night. Extend the handrails, without a break, the full length of the stairs and beyond the top and bottom of the stairs. Stairs are the most dangerous area of the house for seniors; therefore, it is crucial to ensure yours are safe.

Making changes in the guest bathroom is essential. Install support bars for your guest to hold onto when getting into and out of the bath or shower. Use slip-resistant mats inside and outside of bathtubs. Nonslip decals can be placed inside both bathtubs and showers to ensure a better grip.

Pets can be overly anxious and excited when a guest is visiting. Make sure your pet does not place an elderly guest in a dangerous situation.

You can never be too careful when evaluating the safety of your home. There is no better way to show you care than by preparing your home for the company of an elderly loved one.

The holidays are a time of year when children are typically the center of attention. It is easy to forget about the needs of the older adults in our lives, as we are distracted with the chaos surrounding the holiday season.

It is so important to pause and be mindful of our aging relatives. As we prepare our homes for the holidays, take the extra time to ensure your home is safe for all visiting loved ones.

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