



AGING TODAY

Fall Precaution: Celebrating the Fall Season

By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions



In a couple of weeks, we will be celebrating the first day of Fall on September 23. In addition to celebrating the first day of Fall we mark September as the month to celebrate Falls Prevention Awareness Month. Do I really mean celebrate? You may be thinking, well that is a bit hyperbolic, it is still bloody hot! Perhaps observe or commemorate is more fitting when it comes to an entire month to raise awareness of falls prevention. Yes, I do mean celebrate. Do you remember the excitement and energy in the air when you baby-proofed your home? There was no feeling of impending doom, only an affirmation of protection for the future and the security of our loved ones. In Arizona the Fall season feels like a time of renewal and is the perfect time to renew our commitment to the safety of our aging seniors.

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 older adults more susceptible to breaking a wrist or even a hip. Unlike illnesses and diseases taking lives among elderly people, falling is completely preventable.

In 2014, the number of deaths from trips and falls almost equaled the number of deaths caused by motor vehicle accidents. The latest data show us that 75% of all emergency room or urgent care visits for people 65-years old and older are the result of falls. The fact is, many of these trips and falls are caused by preventable circumstances. 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 annually. Over 30,000 older adults died from unintentional fall injuries in 2015. Over 2.8 Million seniors were treated in emergency departments for fall injuries.

Factors that contribute to falls include improper eye-wear, such as wearing sunglasses indoors or inadvertently keeping readers on when walking. Additionally, reminding our seniors about getting yearly eye exams and updating their glasses if need be. Dizziness caused by medication can lead to falls. When filling prescriptions, make sure to ask the pharmacist whether the medicine can affect your balance. And remember, 'medication' not only includes prescription medicines, but also herbal, natural, and over-the-counter remedies such as aspirin or antihistamines. Request a brown bag check-up. A brown-bag check-up is when you gather all your current medications and over-the-counter products into a "brown-bag" and show them to your doctor or pharmacist so he/she can look for any potential problems. Lastly, we need our older adults to be mindful of how alcohol interacts with the medications that they are taking.

Contrary to popular belief, falls are entirely preventable and not a natural part of aging. All of us have the ability to reduce the risk of falls in our aging loved one's homes and when hosting our seniors for a prolonged stay, or even an afternoon visit. Common causes for falls include: Slippery or wet surfaces, poor lighting, uneven floor surfaces, clutter in pathways, and thick soled or loose shoes. Rugs are the leading causes of falls, and ideally should be removed. Most falls in the home occur when going up or down stairs and in and out of the tub or shower. It is imperative that stairways have handrails that extend beyond the first and last step. Increasing the light by adding more overhead lighting fixtures or wall sconces can prevent falls. If lamps are added, cord management is essential.

Here is a list of things you can buy for less than \$20 that will lower your risk for a fall:

- Grab bars for shower or tub
- Mat for shower or tub

- Non-slip bathtub strips
- Velcro strips to secure electrical cords
- Non-slip safety grip pad for rugs
- Motion sensor night light
- Slip resistant socks
- Non-slip tape (skid tape for stairs)
- Raised toilet seat
- Wheelchair seatbelt

When hosting your aging loved one for an overnight or prolonged stay you may need to ensure your guest room is adaptable to the needs of your guest. Place night tables and shelves in places that are easily accessible. Offer to help your loved one unpack, ensuring to store clothing, medication, and necessities within reach. Make sure the outside of your home is well lit and there are no hazards blocking the entrance way to your home. Secure over excited or anxious pets to prevent them from jumping or becoming a tripping hazard.

Celebrating Falls Prevention Awareness Month is an extension of embracing aging and accepting the new normal. Notching those milestone birthdays is very much a privilege. If you don't think so, just ask someone with a terminal illness. Aging gracefully is acknowledging that you may need a new sexy walker, a cool pair of non-slip shoes, or a "Better Homes and Gardens" grab bar for your bathroom. So, hold on to your new prop and whistle your favorite tune to symbolically represent the spring in your step.

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