

Precautions can make homes safer

If you are a senior in a home with poorly lit stairs, a bathtub without grab bars, or scatter rugs on the floor, be aware that more than more than 35 percent of fall-related hip fractures are fatal.

Living independently, however, does not have to be high risk. Suggestions to reduce the risk of falling include:

- remove scatter rugs;
- install motion-sensor lighting near stairs and in bathrooms;
- place railings on both sides of stairs with anti-skid tape on any painted stairs;
- use “reachers” - rather than stepping stools - to get items off high shelves;
- purchase “night lights” that also serve as emergency lights, remaining on during power outages;
- minimize clutter, including stray shoes scattered around the home or near doors
- wear rubber-soled shoes on slippery floors, rather than socks or footies;
- install grab bars (and take travel grab bars on trips) and consider other bath-safety products, such as a transfer bench and shower chair.

For individuals who may have other health or mobility issues - such as being frail, depressed, having poor vision or balance, or taking medicines that may cause dizziness - the risk of falling goes up substantially.

In addition, avoid ladders and step stools. Also, try not to stand up too quickly, which can cause “head rush” and sudden dizziness, that may result in a fall.

Other tips include regular exercise that will help with balance, strength and flexibility. It is proven that weight-bearing exercise can increase muscles and minimize bone loss related to osteoporosis in people well into their 80s.

Joe Breslow is an employee of Mid-Atlantic Medical Supply & Equipment, which has an Owings Mills location.