

A MUST HAVE SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR TODAY'S FAMILY CARERS

# AUSTRALIAN CARERS GUIDE

FOR TODAY'S FAMILY CARER

WINTER 2022 | Issue 3  
QLD

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HELPFUL AND PRACTICAL CONTENT FOR FAMILY CARERS AND THEIR ELDERLY LOVED ONES

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# Mind your Step!

## Help prevent Trips and Falls

### KEY FACTS

- **Nearly 1 in 3 older Australians have experienced a fall in the past 12 months.**
- Falls usually happen because gradual changes to our bodies make walking difficult, or they can be caused by hazards in and around the home.
- Falls can cause hip fractures and other injuries that require lengthy hospital care and long-term effects.
- See your doctor for a check-up if you have ever fallen before, even if you weren't injured as a result.



### DANGERS IN AND AROUND THE HOME

Nearly 2 out of 3 falls happen in and around the home. Common household hazards include:

- ▶ poor lighting
- ▶ unsafe footwear, such as loose slippers or narrow heels
- ▶ slippery surfaces, such as wet or polished floors, or spills
- ▶ trip hazards like rugs, floor mats and electrical cords
- ▶ steps and uneven surfaces

### SLIPPING

Changing what you wear around the home and fixing dangerous surfaces can reduce the risk of slips occurring. Use non-slip mats in wet zones, such as the shower and bathroom. For larger rooms, it may be worth making the whole floor with non-slip material. Install hand rails or a seat in the shower or bath. Place non-skid tape on the edges of steps and stairs to make it easier to see. Remove moss, slime or fallen leaves from outdoor paths. Wearing properly fitted shoes that fit firmly to the foot can also help prevent slips.

### WHY MIGHT OLDER PEOPLE FALL?

If someone falls, it's not necessarily because they are not concentrating or they are clumsy. Reasons why older people might have a fall include:

### CHANGES TO THE BODY

Our bodies change gradually and over many years as part of the normal ageing process. As you get older, you may notice:

- ▶ balance problems, such as feeling unsteady when you walk
- ▶ weaker muscles that, for example, make it harder to lift your feet when you walk
- ▶ poorer eyesight, meaning you don't see quite as clearly, or have difficulty with sudden light changes or glare
- ▶ slower reaction times
- ▶ new health problems, such as incontinence (problems with urinating or with your bowels) or dementia

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## TRIPPING

Even small things can be trip hazards. Keep any walkways clear of clutter, and tape down any electrical cords along skirting boards. Mark any small changes in floor level with contrasting colour so they're clearly seen. Install a "draught excluder" on the bottom of doors instead of loose material that can be tripped over. Get rid of old mats and torn or stretched carpet.



## AFTER A FALL

Many older people become fearful of falling again and lose confidence in walking. You may start to do less physical activity. However, over time this reduced movement actually makes it more likely to have another fall because of poorer balance, weaker muscles and stiffer joints.

# 9 WAYS TO PREVENT *Falling at Home*

BY WYATT MYERS



**1 Clean up clutter.** The easiest method for preventing falls is to keep your home neat and tidy. Remove all clutter, such as stacks of old newspapers and magazines, especially from hallways and staircases.



**2 Repair or remove tripping hazards.** Sometimes home fixtures can contribute to falls, which can then lead to back pain and other injuries. Examine every room and hallway, looking for items such as loose carpet, slippery throw rugs, or wood floorboards that stick up. Then repair, remove, or replace those items for more effective fall prevention.



**3 Install grab bars and handrails.** These safety devices are crucial for going up and down stairs, getting on and off the toilet, and stepping in and out of the bathtub without injuring yourself. Gary Kaplan, DO, founder and medical director of the Kaplan Center for

Integrative Medicine in McLean, Virginia, suggests installing grab bars by toilets and bathtubs and handrails in stairways and hallways. Have a handyman or family member help with this if necessary.



**4 Avoid wearing loose clothing.** You want to feel comfortable at home, but baggy clothes can sometimes make you more likely to fall. Opt for better-fitting and properly hemmed clothing that doesn't bunch up or drag on the ground.





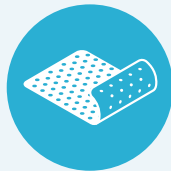
**5 Light it right.** Inadequate lighting is another major hazard. To create a home that's more suitable for the elderly, install brighter light bulbs where needed, particularly in stairways and narrow hallways. Robert Bunning, MD, associate medical director of inpatient services at MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C., also recommends adding night-lights in bedrooms and bathrooms for better guidance at night.



**6 Wear shoes.** Socks may be comfortable, but they present a slipping risk. Preventing falls at home can be as simple as wearing shoes. You can also purchase non-slip socks that have grips on the soles of the feet if shoes are too uncomfortable.



**7 Make it nonslip.** Bathtubs and showers, as well as floors in kitchens, bathrooms, and porches, can become extremely dangerous when wet. To prevent falls on slick surfaces, Dr. Kaplan recommends nonslip mats.



**8 Live on one level.** Even with precautions like guardrails, stairs can present a significant falling hazard. "If possible, live on one level," says Kaplan. "Otherwise be extra-careful when you negotiate stairs." If it's not possible to live on one level, try to limit the trips you take up and down the stairs.

**9 Move more carefully.** Dr. Bunning explains that many people fall at home by moving too quickly from a sitting to a standing position and vice versa. Preventing falls like this is as easy as taking your time. "All you have to do is pause after going from lying down to sitting and from sitting to standing," he says. "Also take a pause before using the railing on stairs, whether going up or down."



## HOW DO YOU PICK UP A SENIOR WHO HAS FALLEN?

*They should start by rolling over to one side. Rest there to let the body and blood pressure adjust. Next, they should slowly get up on their hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy chair.*

