

Tips To Protect Older Americans From Falls

(NAPSA)—Taking steps to prevent falls in the home can be an important way to protect the safety of older Americans.

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to the emergency room in the U.S. and the primary cause of accidental death in people over age 65, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, each year more than one-third of older adults experience a fall, and between 20 percent and 30 percent of those falls result in moderate to severe injuries such as hip fractures or head injuries.

Know The Risks

The risk for death, serious injury and disability from falls increases as one ages, and falls can have an especially significant impact on individuals who are already in need of assistance. Other risk factors include pre-existing conditions such as osteoporosis, glaucoma, cataracts and eye disease, as well as issues related to muscle strength, balance and gait.

Medications used to treat both acute and chronic health problems can also sometimes increase an individual's risk for falling, as can consuming alcohol.

Fall Prevention

There are a number of steps you can take to help reduce your family member's risk of falls. These include ensuring that he or she:

- Changes positions slowly to prevent falls related to drops in blood pressure. When first getting up in the morning, it is wise to sit at the edge of the bed for a short time before standing up.
- Wears supportive, low-heeled, rubber-soled shoes.

SINCE YOU CARE

A Series of Guides from MetLife in Cooperation with the National Alliance for Caregiving

Falls and Fall Prevention

About the Subject

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to the emergency rooms in the U.S. and the primary cause of accidental death in people over age 65. Each year more than one-third of older adults experience a fall, and between 20% and 30% of those falls result in moderate to severe injuries such as hip fractures or head injuries. In 2004, about 1.8 million individuals age 65 and over received emergency room treatment for fall-related injuries, with 43,000 requiring hospitalization. Additionally, in that same year, more than 14,000 people age 65 and over died from fall related injuries.*

The risk for death, serious injury, and disability from falls increases as one ages. Close to 80% of deaths from falls in 2004 were among individuals age 75 and over. Those in this age group who fall are three to five times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home for a year or more.**



Caregivers face more challenges as they search for information and make decisions about how best to provide care to their loved ones. To help meet their needs, MetLife offers SinceYouCare™ — a series of guides which provide practical suggestions and useful links to a variety of specific care-related products.

Taking steps around the home—such as removing throw rugs and securing carpets—can help keep older Americans from falling.

- Exercises caution when walking on thick-pile carpets.
- Does not wear smooth-soled slippers or socks on smooth floors such as wood or linoleum.
- Uses caution when walking outdoors, especially when it is wet or icy.
- Limits intake of alcohol.
- Does not wear glasses that are meant for reading when performing activities other than reading.
- Takes medications as prescribed and reports any apparent side effects.

Safe At Home

It is also important to look at the living environment and potential changes that can reduce the risk of falls. Try these tips:

- Ensure that all rooms are well and evenly lit.
- Use night-lights in halls and bathrooms.
- Avoid very bright lights that

could increase glare.

- Have a light or flashlight by the bedside that your loved one can use if he or she needs to get up during the night.

- Be sure that lighting is bright enough in hallways, stairways and bathrooms.

- Keep walkways clear of electrical cords and telephone wires.

- Arrange furniture so it does not interfere with walking.

- Check to see if thresholds present a tripping risk. Widen doorways, if possible.

- Make sure that furniture is not too low to the floor, or too high to allow your family member to get up from or onto without difficulty.

- Remove throw rugs and secure carpets.

- Install handrails on both sides of stairways, if possible.

- Mark the first and last stair with a strip of bright paint or colored adhesive tape made specifically for stair steps.

- Place nonskid strips in the tub or shower.

- Install grab bars in the tub or shower and next to the toilet.

- Install an elevated seat on the toilet if it is too low and your loved one has difficulty getting on and off.

Learn More

Helpful information can also be found in a free booklet called “Falls and Fall Prevention” from MetLife Mature Market Institute and the National Alliance for Caregiving.

For a copy, you can call (203) 221-6580, e-mail maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com, visit www.maturemarketinstitute.com or write MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.