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Simple Steps Can Help Older Adults Avoid Falls in the Home



VNSNY, Community Contributor ✓

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By Gladys Bayles-Panes, Occupational Therapist with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York

September is National [Falls Prevention Awareness Month](#) and [National Falls Prevention Week](#), which kicks off on the first day of Fall, is the perfect time to review a few safety tips that many of us take for granted on a daily basis.

The [CDC reports](#) that one out of every four older adults has a serious fall each year, but that's just the tip of the iceberg:

- One out of five falls causes serious injury like broken bones or head trauma
- Three million seniors are treated in emergency rooms after being injured in falls every year
- Over 800,000 are hospitalized after a fall, with head and hip injuries being the most common
- More than 95% of broken hips are the result of falls, usually by falling sideways
- The most common cause of traumatic brain injuries are falls
- In 2015, victims of falls paid more than \$50 billion in medical bills

As an Occupational Therapist (OT) with the [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#), I'm part of an interdisciplinary team of physical therapists and other clinicians who care for New Yorkers in their homes. My work as an OT is specifically focused on helping patients resume the activities of daily living—such as dressing, bathing, cooking or accessing the community safely—after hospitalization or a major illness.

Assessing the home environment for safety is one of the first things we do when we meet a new patient. Here are a few guidelines that we hope will help you and your elderly loved ones avoid trips and falls and stay safe on your feet at home:

Clutter – Put away all forms of clutter that can be tripped over. That includes stacks of old newspapers or mail and magazines that may be piled up in hallways and staircases.

Grab Bars – Have a handyman or family member install grab bars inside and outside of the tub/shower and next to the toilet.

Railings – If the home has stairs, add railings to BOTH sides. If it is possible, live in a level home.

Wear Shoes – As comfortable as they may feel, it is easier to slip when only wearing socks on your feet. Non-slip socks with grips on the soles are also available if shoes are uncomfortable.

Lighting – Have all rooms in the home as well-lit as possible by adding more and/or brighter bulbs. It is especially recommended to do this in bedrooms and bathrooms for better night guidance.

Take Your Time – Falls often occur when an older person attempts to move from a sitting to standing position too quickly. It is important to pause and pace yourself when doing this.

Rugs – Tape down corners of rugs to the floor, which will make them much harder to trip over.

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Telephone – Keeping phones near the bed will make them easier—and safer—to reach, especially if you're awakened from sleep.

Exercise – Maintaining your strength and balance through regular exercise. You can ask for recommendations from an OT or a physical therapist.

Gladys Bayles-Panes is an Occupational Therapist with the [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#). For more information about the range of home care services provided by VNSNY expert clinicians, please visit www.VNSNY.org or call [1-800-675-0391](tel:1-800-675-0391).