

## Improving your Balance & Decreasing Your Risks for Falls/Hip Injuries

We are going to address three main areas to improve your balance and decrease your risks for fall/hip injuries.

1. Strength
2. Need for assistive device.
3. Home Environment

### *Strength:*

As we become older and less mobile and active, our bodies can experience a significant decline in overall strength. Decreased leg strength can greatly affect balance. Here are three standard exercises we recommend helping improve lower extremity strength and balance:

1. Sit-to stands: Variations include use of arm rests, use of pad or pillow to raise surface, use of just one arm rest, pushing off own thighs, no help with arms, arms held out straight in front. (2 sets of 10)



2. Standing hip abductions. Stand behind chair or hold onto a counter or sink and raise one leg out to the side with toe pointed straight ahead. Perform 10 repetitions. Repeat with the other leg. (2 sets of 10)
3. Ankle strengthening. Perform Ziggy Zags. Go out about 10 feet and come back. Repeat.

### *Need for assistive device:*

You may have heard the saying, “Pride goeth before a fall.” Now while this saying was not meant to refer to a physical fall, we see this frequently. People are

too proud to use an assistive device, and hence they fall. We find it interesting that in many cases an extreme limp occurs because an assistive device is not used- which draws more attention to a person than a cane would. Watch our upcoming video, *How to Walk with Hip Pain using a Cane, Walker, Walking Stick, etc.* to help you choose an appropriate aid.

### *Home Environment*

Many falls and broken bones occur in the home and could have been prevented with some simple changes. This Home Safety Checklist was compiled from several sources but the bulk of it was taken from the AARP Preventing Falls Checklist. These simple changes can cut a person's risk for falling in half.

## **HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST**

### **All Rooms**

- Install carpet with short, dense pile.
- Secure rugs with double-sided carpet tape.
- Use non-skid, no-wax flooring.
- Make thresholds even with floor.
- Arrange furniture so you can easily get around it.
- Reposition electrical and extension cords out of the way.
- Keep exits and hallways open.
- Use stable chairs with armrests to help you get up.
- Provide bright, evenly distributed light.
- Use lampshades that reduce glare.
- Put light switches and electrical outlets within easy reach. Glow-in-the-dark switches may be helpful.
- Use nightlights.
- Don't leave anything on the floor that might cause you to trip.
- Remove low coffee tables, magazine racks, footrests, and plants from pathways in rooms.
- Keep electric, appliance, and telephone cords out of your pathways, but do not put cords under a rug.
- Place carpeting over concrete, ceramic, and marble floors to lessen the severity of injury if you fall.
- Repair loose wooden floorboards immediately.
- Throw away wobbly chairs, ladders, and tables.
- Do not sit in a chair or on a sofa that is so low it is difficult for you to stand up.
- Beware of furniture that may tip and could fall on person (if pulled on). Tall shelves with narrow depth are an example. They should be secured to the wall.

### **Stairs**

- Install handrails on both sides of stairways at the best height for you.
- Make sure steps are even and in good shape.
- Check that carpet adheres firmly along stairs; repair or replace worn carpet.

Choose a carpet that does not hide step edges or create illusions such as steps that appear deeper than they are.

Remove rugs at the top or bottom of stairways and secure all other rugs firmly to the floor.

Use good lighting (at least 60-watt bulbs) in stairways; install on-off switches at the top and bottom of stairs. Provide enough light to see each step and the top and bottom landings.

Make sure stairs are clear of all objects.

Watch out for a single step—people often trip when there is only one step.

Consider installing motion detector lights, which turn on automatically and light your stairway.

If you have bare-wood steps, put nonslip treads on each step.

## **Kitchen**

Throw away broken stepstools. Use only a stepstool with an attached handrail so that you are supported.

Clean spills immediately to avoid slipping. Walk on floors only after cleaning solutions have dried thoroughly.

Do away with floor wax or use nonskid floor wax.

Do not stand on the countertops. Do not stand on chairs or boxes to reach upper cabinets.

## **Bathroom**

Use rubber bathmats or strips in bathtubs and showers.

Install at least two grab bars in the shower/bath. Install grab bars on the bathroom walls near the toilet.

Clean up water from the floor.

Secure bathroom rugs to the floor.

Use raised toilet seats and install handrails within reach.

Always use a night-light.

Replace glass shower enclosures with non-shattering material.

Mount a liquid soap dispenser on the bathtub/shower wall.

Use a sturdy, plastic seat in the bathtub if you are unsteady or if you cannot lower yourself to the floor of the tub.

## **Outside**

Brightly light all paths and stoops.

Install handrails along any flight of outdoor steps.

Spread sand or salt on icy walkways.

Keep steps, sidewalks, decks, and porches clear of newspapers, sticks, rocks, wet leaves, and other debris.

Repair broken or uneven pavement on walkways and driveways.

Remove roots that protrude from the ground.

Clean spills immediately, especially oily ones on concrete or asphalt.

## **Bedroom**

Place a lamp and flashlight near your bed.  
Sleep on a bed that is easy to get into and out of.  
Install nightlights along the route between the bedroom and the bathroom.  
Keep a telephone near your bed.

**Tips**

Use non-skid contrasting tape, rubber stair treads, or coated, skid-resistant treatment on non-carpeted stairs; apply tape to dry, clean surfaces at one-inch intervals; use three long strips of tape on each step.

Take your time and pay attention when you are on the stairs.

Be especially careful when you carry large loads.

Do not wear shoes you can slip in.

**Be especially careful when you:**

Cannot reach the handrails.

Cannot grasp them properly because they're an awkward shape.

Encounter uneven steps, obstacles on the steps, or non-skid treads that are too small.

Find floor wax, surfaces in poor repair, worn tread surfaces, or poorly secured floor

Coverings on your floors.

Experience distractions around you.

Be careful on holidays, weddings, and other big gatherings with lots of people. Distractions are common and so are losses of balance.

Beware of sit to stand chairs. These are the recliners that can rise with the push of a switch. We have found that people that use them become dependent on them and eventually their legs get weaker and weaker. If a sit to stand chair is needed it should be raised as little as possible. The person using it should still have to work to get from sit to stand. Using the chair minimally will help maintain the user's lower extremity strength.