Simple Ways to Reduce Fall Risks for Older People at Home and Outdoors

Understanding the Risk of Falls as We Age

Falls are one of the most common and serious concerns for older adults. They can happen anywhere: in the living room, on the garden path, or while stepping off a bus. The consequences often go beyond a bruise or a fracture. A fall can reduce confidence, limit independence, and change daily routines. That is why thinking ahead about fall prevention is not about being overcautious. It is about staying active and secure in the places that matter most.

Many factors increase fall risk as people age. Muscle strength and balance naturally decline. Vision changes can make it harder to see obstacles. Medications may cause dizziness or drowsiness. And everyday hazards like loose rugs, poor lighting, or slippery surfaces become more dangerous. The good news is that most falls can be prevented with a few practical adjustments around the home and some awareness when going out. A reliable form of protection after an unexpected fall can also offer peace of mind for the whole family.



Start Indoors: The Living Areas

The home should be a safe base, not a source of hidden danger. Start by looking at the floors. Remove or secure loose rugs and mats. Use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so they do not slide. Keep walkways clear of furniture, cords, and clutter. Arrange chairs and tables so there is a clear path from one room to another.

Lighting is equally important. Install night lights in hallways, bathrooms, and bedrooms. Make sure light switches are easy to reach from the bed and at the entrance of each room. Consider motion-activated lights that turn on automatically when someone gets up at night. Dim lighting can hide a step, a pet, or a shoe left on the floor.



Check the Stairs

Stairs are a common site for falls. Ensure handrails are sturdy and run the full length of the staircase on both sides. Use non-slip treads or strips on each step. Keep stairs free of objects, and make sure the lighting is bright enough to see every step clearly. If balance is a concern, avoid carrying items up or down the stairs. Instead, use a basket or ask for help.

Bathroom Safety

The bathroom is a high-risk area because of wet, smooth surfaces. Install grab bars near the toilet and inside the shower or bath. Use a non-slip mat on the shower floor and a bath mat outside the shower. A shower chair or a bench can make bathing safer and less tiring. Consider

a handheld shower head so the user can sit while washing. The toilet height can also be raised with a frame or a riser for easier sitting and standing.

The Kitchen and Dining Area

In the kitchen, store everyday items within easy reach. Avoid high shelves that require stretching or using a step stool. Keep the floor dry and clean up spills immediately. Use a sturdy chair with armrests at the dining table. A rolling cart can help move dishes and food without carrying heavy loads. If standing for long periods is tiring, a small stool or a high chair at the counter can provide support.

View this on familyr.co.nz

Bedroom Adjustments

Make the bedroom a calm and safe space. The bed height should allow the person to sit on the edge with feet flat on the floor. If the bed is too high or too low, adjust the frame or use a bed riser. Keep a clear path from the bed to the bathroom. A lamp or flashlight within arm's reach helps during the night. Consider a bed rail if the person tends to roll out of bed. For those who feel unsteady, a bedside commode may be a practical option.

Outdoor Hazards to Watch For

When stepping outside, the risks change but do not disappear. Walkways and driveways should be in good repair, without cracks, uneven slabs, or loose stones. Keep paths clear of garden tools, hoses, and potted plants. In wet weather, moss or algae on concrete can become very slippery. A pressure wash or a gentle bleach solution can remove the growth. In winter, spread grit or sand on icy patches.

Garden steps need the same care as indoor stairs: a handrail, non-slip surfaces, and good lighting. If the garden is large, consider creating a seating area with a bench where the person can rest. For longer walks, a mobility aid such as a walking stick or a rollator can provide extra support.



Footwear and Clothing

What someone wears affects their stability. Shoes with non-slip soles and a low, wide heel provide better grip than flip-flops or slippers. Inside the home, well-fitting slippers with a rubber sole are safer than loose or backless styles. Clothing should fit well and not drag on the ground. Avoid long robes or trousers that can catch on furniture or door handles.

Staying Active and Aware

Strength and balance exercises can reduce fall risk. Simple activities like walking, tai chi, or gentle yoga improve muscle tone and coordination. Many community centres offer classes for older adults. Even standing on one leg while brushing teeth can help maintain balance. Regular

eye and hearing checks are important because sensory changes can affect stability. Some medications cause dizziness, so reviewing prescriptions with a doctor every year is wise.

View this on familyr.co.nz

When going out, plan the route ahead if possible. Choose shops and venues that are accessible, with no steep stairs or slippery floors. Carry a small bag or backpack to keep hands free. A walking stick or a folding cane can be a simple aid. If the person uses a wheelchair or walker, check that doorways and ramps are wide enough. The same principle applies: the more prepared the environment, the lower the risk. A thoughtful approach to daily life can provide real protection after an unexpected fall.

When a Fall Happens

Even with the best prevention, falls can still occur. That is why having a plan matters. An older person living alone may not be able to get up after a fall. This is where a medical alert for falls becomes relevant. Such devices can detect a fall automatically and send an alert to family members or a monitoring centre. Some models include GPS location sharing, so help can find the person even if they are outdoors. Two-way calling allows the person to speak with a responder, confirming the situation or cancelling the alert if it was a false alarm.

Knowing that help is just a button press away can reduce anxiety for both the older person and their loved ones. It allows the person to maintain their independence while staying connected to a safety net. The value of a medical alert for falls lies not only in the technology but in the reassurance it provides every day.



Simple Habits That Make a Difference

Small routines can prevent big problems. Keep a phone or a personal alarm within reach at all times. Place a cordless phone in the bedroom and another in the living room. If the person wears a fall detection pendant, make sure it is worn every day, not left on the bedside table. Charge all devices regularly so they work when needed.

Encourage the older person to move slowly and deliberately, especially when getting up from a chair or bed. Rushing increases the chance of tripping or losing balance. A few seconds of sitting up before standing can help the body adjust. When walking, take short steps and use handrails or walls for support if needed.

Involving the Whole Family

Fall prevention works best when everyone contributes. Family members can visit and do a room-by-room check for hazards. They can help install grab bars, rearrange furniture, or improve lighting. They can also encourage the older person to stay active and join them on walks. Open communication about safety is important: no one wants to feel controlled, but most older adults appreciate knowing that their family cares about their wellbeing.

View this on familyr.co.nz

Finally, remember that a home can be both safe and beautiful. Many safety products now come in designs that blend with home decor. Grab bars can be decorative, non-slip mats can be colourful, and lighting can be warm and soft. There is no need to sacrifice comfort for safety. The goal is to create an environment where the older person feels confident and supported. With a few thoughtful changes, the risk of falling can be greatly reduced, and life can continue with more freedom and less worry.