

# STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE SAFETY OF PEOPLE AT RISK OF FALLING

## Stairs:

- ❑ Avoid leaving items on the stairs – even if planning to take them up next trip as others would be unaware they are there, small objects are obscured from vision by the step above
- ❑ Avoid furniture on half landings or at the bottom of stairs (reduces the stair width and provides an object to fall onto)
- ❑ Install a telephone extension upstairs
- ❑ Have an additional vacuum for upstairs
- ❑ Use small hand held vacuum, a damp cloth or a dustpan and brush to clean stairs or ask others to do it
- ❑ Replace patterned carpets with light colored plain ones, particularly on the stairs and particularly carpets with horizontal or vertical lines
- ❑ The colour of carpets should contrast with the walls to define the floor: wall boundary
- ❑ Replace poor condition stair coverings
- ❑ Remove loose rugs from the top of stairs
- ❑ Switch on stair lights when descending at night (18% of older people don't)
- ❑ Install night lights beside the first and last steps
- ❑ Install a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs
- ❑ Avoid carrying objects up/down stairs (restricts view of stair surface) – use pockets/bags instead
- ❑ Only carry things that require 1 hand, leaving the other free to hold on – ask others to carry large objects
- ❑ Coming down backwards moving an item down a step at a time poses the risk of misjudging the bottom of the stairs
- ❑ Avoid having mirrors on half landings
- ❑ Stair rails should preferably be a round pole style with a diameter of 220mm and extend 1 tread width beyond the last riser
- ❑ Bifocals (worn by 57% of older people) increase difficulty in judging depth and distance and can cause distortion - discuss with optician
- ❑ Vari-focals (worn by 22% of older people) can cause blurred or double vision when walking around - discuss with optician
- ❑ Avoid carrying large amounts of laundry downstairs, have a laundry basket next to the washing machine and bring dirty items down a few at a time or locate washing machine and dryer upstairs where most laundry is generated
- ❑ Have a walking aid at the top and bottom of the stairs
- ❑ Stair lifts should be able to be parked in a position that does not cause severe obstruction for other users
- ❑ Use a 100 watt light bulb at the top and bottom of stairs
- ❑ Use a low energy light bulb and leave it on all night
- ❑ Avoid positioning smoke alarms over the stairs to allow for safe testing and battery changing
- ❑ Landing windows above the stairs require less maintenance if curtains are removed and frosted glass is used to reduce frequency of cleaning
- ❑ Fit a second alarm control panel upstairs to avoid rushing to get to free zones
- ❑ Paint white strips on the edges of concrete steps

## General:



- Purchase secure, light weight step ladders for those who climb (slanted at 75 degrees from horizontal, wide base, high hand rail and a tool holding compartment are desirable)
- Avoid thick pile carpets which catch feet
- Avoid putting an overlay of protective carpeting of the same pattern on fitted carpets
- Use double sided tape to secure mats or place a thin layer of foam underneath loose mats and rugs
- Use 1471 to find out who has telephoned rather than rushing to answer
- Replace patterned wallpaper with plain bright wall coverings when next decorating
- Contrast furniture with floor and wall covers
- Avoid furniture with splayed legs
- Ensure that furniture used for support whilst mobilising is stable
- Replace unstable chairs/tables
- Avoid pedestal style tables which tip easily or position them away from traffic ways
- Select table tops with a contrasting border to assist in identifying the boundary
- Clean up dust on smooth floor surfaces
- Use curtain pull cords to avoid over reaching
- Use fall detectors if living alone
- Use a door intercom upstairs to avoid rushing to answer the door
- Keep pets confined over night and during times of high activity to avoid tripping over them in poor light
- Give pets a fluorescent collar or a bell so that they are noticed more easily
- Consider a pet training programme
- Position pet food bowls away from traffic ways to avoid tripping over pets while they eat
- Mop up spills immediately
- Scan ahead when walking rather than watching feet
- Avoid taking alcohol and prescribed medication together if contra-indicated
- Rearrange diary for 2 days after a change in medication to enable extra care to be taken
- Develop an awareness of potential hazards
- Have something in the entrance to put bags and shoes on that is above floor level
- Be aware that visitors often introduce new hazards to a home (handbag straps, toys, shoes in the entrance)
- Avoid having throws or bed clothes that dangle onto the floor
- Avoid thick framed glasses that may obscure the visual field
- Move awkward or heavy things around on a trolley
- Use adhesive slip resistant strips 50mm apart on linoleum floors and surfaces used to support weight e.g. sink rim (colour should match the floor surface to prevent them being interpreted as ground elevations)
- Walk heel to toe
- Hip protectors may be beneficial for older ladies with a slight build to cushion a fall
- Establish a routine to indicate safety to neighbours such as opening a pre specified set of curtains each morning
- Contrast the colour of handrails with the walls to promote visibility
- Avoid chairs with seat edges that over hang the position of the legs which may tip during transfers
- Have a flu injection as illness renders people more prone to falling



## Lighting:

- ❏ Avoid lampshades that reduce illumination (solid plastic design)
- ❏ Avoid sudden changes in light intensity e.g. going from a dimly lit room to bright lighting and vice versa (causes temporary blindness)
- ❏ Get practical help to change light bulbs
- ❏ Use of long life bulbs (reduces frequency with which they need changing but some have a delay in reaching full brightness which can be helpful in adjusting to changes in light intensity)
- ❏ Avoid too low or too high wattage bulbs (check the safety of the lampshade and fittings with the light bulb - most lampshades and fittings are made for bulbs under 100 watts)
- ❏ Make light switches more accessible, particularly traffic ways to reach them
- ❏ Make light switches more visible by contrasting colour with the walls
- ❏ Use night lights
- ❏ Ensure that bedside lights have a secure base and an accessible switch or use a touch lamp or light on the bed head board for easy access
- ❏ Turn on lights when getting up in the night but allow time for eyes to accommodate to the change
- ❏ Use fluorescent lighting for traffic ways
- ❏ Use opaque light bulbs to reduce glare
- ❏ Use net curtains to counteract glare from sunlight
- ❏ Avoid changes in floor surfaces in areas prone to shifts in lighting (whilst eyes are adjusting, changes in surface might not be recognised in time to adjust gait)
- ❏ Choose matt non reflecting surfaces when re decorating a room

## Kitchen:

- ❏ Boil food in a chip basket to avoid lifting pans of boiling water to drain food
- ❏ Rearrange cupboards placing commonly used items on shelves that require the least reaching
- ❏ Re-hang fridge doors to avoid over reaching
- ❏ Avoid buying ovens with doors that drop down which are easy to trip over

## Clothes:

- ❏ Dressing gowns can present a trip hazard particularly on the stairs
- ❏ Wear sari slightly shorter
- ❏ Avoid baggy, ill fitting clothes
- ❏ Wear well fitting shoes that allow proper grip and feeling of the floor surface
- ❏ Apply a rubber solution to the heels of worn shoes/ score the soles of leather shoes
- ❏ Avoid walking in stockinged feet
- ❏ Sleep in bed socks with a non slip tread if nocturnal bathroom trips are necessary
- ❏ Glasses without rims can make it difficult to distinguish where the glasses end and thus affect depth perception

## Bathroom:

- ✚ Increase accessibility of toiletries from bath/shower
- ✚ Place a light in medicine cabinet
- ✚ Carpet bathroom floor to avoid slippery wet floors or use sheet rubber flooring
- ✚ Use toilet seats whose colour contrasts with the toilet pan and cistern to facilitate proper seating placement
- ✚ Contrast bathroom walls with the toilet pan to enable people to visualise the toilet

## Garden:

- Roughened concrete is a good non slip surface
- Install external sensor lights

## Public transport:

- ✚ Have money ready in advance
- ✚ Be early to be first in the queue (it allows more time to sit down)
- ✚ Travel at off peak times to avoid the crowds
- ✚ Find out which bus routes have accessible busses
- ✚ Take a back pack to carry shopping
- ✚ Ask the driver not to set off until you are seated
- ✚ Take the first seat as close to the front as possible
- ✚ Keep a hand free to hold on<sup>6</sup>
- ✚ Ask the driver to pull in as close to the pavement as possible
- ✚ Once off the bus, pause and walk in the direction the bus is traveling
- ✚ Use the bus stop sign to help get from the road to the pavement
- ✚ Ring before traveling by train and ask for extra help

## Out doors:

- 📱 Develop strategies for crossing roads safely
- 📱 Avoid going out at peak times - rush hour
- 📱 Plan outings
- 📱 Plan toilet stops
- 📱 Allow extra time to get places when outside of usual local environment
- 📱 Avoid windy conditions
- 📱 Slow down pace
- 📱 Wear a rain hood rather than hold an umbrella if a walking stick is used outdoors<sup>5</sup>
- 📱 Wear woolly socks over the top of outdoor shoes in icy and slushy conditions