

Senior Focus

Safety in Your Home

We all like to think that our homes are safe and there is no cause for concern. Moving, bending, or lifting can become more challenging as we age and our reaction times might be slower. We might think that the lighting is fine and that there is no cause for concern regarding our depth perception. However, it is easy to unexpectedly trip or stumble, which is why we call these events accidents. This month I would like to focus on making our homes safer. The primary source of information for this article comes from NC State University and NC A&T State University, Cooperative Extension and the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

A simple fall can result in bruises or broken bones and possibly even result in a more serious injury that will place limitations on quality of life. If there are things we can do to be proactive about potential hazards in our homes, we need to assess and fix those things.

- ✓ Emergency numbers and your address should be posted by all of the telephones within your home. Occasionally in a time of emergency what you generally can remember may not be recalled.
- ✓ Have a telephone installed in your bedroom or have a cell phone that gets good reception in your bedroom.
- ✓ You might consider doors with lever-action handles rather than door knobs, as they are easier to manipulate.
- ✓ Windows should have a security lock on them so that they cannot be easily opened from the outside.
- ✓ Throw rugs should have non-skid backings and should not be in the main traffic areas, which might cause a fall. Or better yet, don't have throw rugs.
- ✓ Extension cords might be handy but make sure the cords are kept behind furniture so that they do not become a trip hazard.
- ✓ If you have a space heater make sure it cannot easily fall over and the area is properly vented.
- ✓ Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms should be placed in hallways and near sleeping areas. Make sure the batteries are fresh. Change them at least once a year, possibly on your birthday so that you easily remember to make the change.
- ✓ If you have a gas range make sure it has an automatic cut-off in the event of flame failure. And make sure there are no curtains or other flammable objects nearby.
- ✓ Unplug small appliances when they are not in use.
- ✓ If you need to reach something higher up, have a small step stool/ladder to use rather than a chair. Chairs can easily tip over whereas step stools/ladders are made to be stepped on.
- ✓ If you splatter grease or spill something, clean it up right away to eliminate slipping.
- ✓ Make sure steps are free of objects and they are well lighted.
- ✓ Door thresholds should be low, beveled or better yet, don't have any thresholds. It's easy to stumble on them when in a hurry.
- ✓ Have your light switches located near an entrance.
- ✓ Make sure your furniture is steady. If it is broken or wobbly, ask someone to fix it.
- ✓ Have a non-skid mat in the tub or shower.
- ✓ Grab bars should be installed on the wall by the toilet and bathtub.
- ✓ Medicines should be kept out of reach of children.
- ✓ Have a night light in the bathroom.
- ✓ Keep a flash light within reach of your bed and make sure you have fresh batteries in it.
- ✓ Keep your outside steps and walkways clear of debris and repair any cracks in the cement.
- ✓ If you have outside steps make sure you have sturdy railings to hold on to as you go up and down.
- ✓ Give a trusted neighbor or a close relative a key to your home. You never know when that might come in handy.

Not all safety precautions are listed but these may be enough to get you started with the assessment of your environment. The County Extension Agency would be happy to answer any questions you might have. Wendy Wedum is the contact person for the Pondera County Extension from Montana State University. Her office is located in Conrad and Wendy's number is 406-271-4052.