Creating a Safer Home: Useful Equipment and Strategies for Household Activities
Key Points and References

Falls
- 1 in 3 people over 65 fall each year
- 15% of people with knee osteoarthritis fall each year
- Falls can result in serious health consequences that lead to permanent disability and loss of independence
  - 33% of people who fall will never regain their previous level of function

Fall Prevention
- Individual Risk factors:
  - taking more than 4 medications
  - poor vision
  - decreased strength and balance
- Individual Prevention
  - Review medications with your doctors
  - Get vision checked every year
  - Consult with physical therapist for strength and balance issues
- Environmental Risk
  - Most common place to fall is in the home
  - There are many ways to modify the home and home activities to make them safer and easier

General Modifications for the Home
- Remove or tack down loose rugs and mats
- Check that carpets are flush to the ground by examining for wrinkles and bubbles. Contact your local carpet installation company to fix this problem.
- Make sure there’s good lighting throughout the house
- Use nightlights in frequently used rooms at night like the bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen
- Consider using an automatic light switch or light on a timer if switches are hard to reach
- Minimize clutter and tack down loose electrical cords
- Create clear pathways throughout the house

Stair Recommendations
• Make sure no loose mats or rugs are around the stairs
• If carpet is on the stairs, be sure it is secure by examining for wrinkles and bubbles. Contact your local carpet installation company to fix this problem.
• If stairs are bare, put non-skid strips at the edge
• Have railings on both sides of stairs at hip-height, if possible
• When going up and down stairs, remember up with the good and down with the bad
  o when going up stairs, start with your less painful, or “good” leg, and follow with the more painful, or “bad” leg
  o when going down stairs, start with the more painful, or “bad” leg, and follow with the less painful, “good” leg

Kitchen Recommendations
• Keep frequently used things in easy-to-reach places
• If you need to get something up high, use a step-stool with a bar on top, NOT a chair or barstool
• Avoid carrying heavy things, like large pots of liquids or food
  o Take smaller trips, make smaller portions, or slide heavy things on a potholder

Bathroom Recommendations
• Long-handled sponge for hard-to-reach places like back and feet
• Soap dispensers to avoid reaching down for dropped soap
• Grab-bars or rails to help you get in and out
• Consider using a step-stool to get in and out if you must go over a tub threshold
• Put non-skid mats on the floor of shower/tub
• Ensure that door/curtain effectively keeps water inside the shower
• Consider using a raised toilet seat if standing from the toilet is difficult

Chairs and Couches
• Standing from low chairs and squishy couches put lots of force through the knees when standing up
• If standing from chairs or couches is painful, try to use higher chairs, or use raised seats or extra cushions

Lifting Recommendations
• Keep feet shoulder-width apart
• Check the load before you lift it to see if it’s too heavy or unstable
• For heavy loads, take multiple trips or ask someone for help
• For picking small things off the floor use a reacher or the golfer’s lift (see below)
• As you lift, ALWAYS:
  ○ Keep the load as close to you as possible
  ○ Keep your back straight
  ○ Turn your feet outward and push your buttocks out (picture a professional weightlifter)
  ○ Bend your knees
  ○ Keep your back straight
  ○ Keep your head forward - your lift will be more balanced
  ○ Breathe out as you lift

Other Devices/Equipment
• Canes used on opposite side of more painful leg and walkers can decrease the load through the joint and allow you to walk further without stopping
• ALWAYS wear shoes, even when inside
  ○ bare feet, and wearing only socks or slippers inside contributes to falls
  ○ wear low-heeled shoes with slip-resistant soles both inside and outside

Track Your Symptoms
• Track activities you do throughout the day as well as your symptoms like pain and stiffness
• If your joints become stiff after sitting still for a period of time, try to move the joint around BEFORE the stiffness starts
  ○ bend and straighten the knee every 10-15 mins
  ○ Stand slowly and make sure the knee feels good before starting to walk around

  **Performing the Golfer’s Lift**

Use the golfer’s lift to pick up light objects from the floor. This is especially appropriate for people with knee pain. In these instructions, the right hand is grabbing the object. The sides can be reversed for picking something up with the left hand.

*CAUTION:* This lift is NOT advised for people with back pain. Consult your physical therapist or physician before using this technique.

1. Place your left hand near the edge of a sturdy, fixed surface like a counter, heavy table, or couch, NOT a chair or wall. This hand will support your upper body during the lift.
2. Keep your back straight and raise your right leg straight out behind you as you lean down to pick up the object. The weight of your leg will counterbalance the weight of your upper body.
3. Grasp the object firmly.
4. Prepare for the lift by looking forward. Keep your leg raised as you initiate the lift.
5. To lift, push down on the sturdy, fixed surface as you lower your leg. Keep your back straight and breathe out as you lift.

Example Pictures of Equipment

RUG TACKING
LOOSE CARPET

NON-SLIP STRIPS FOR STAIRS

STEP STOOL WITH BAR DISPENSER  LONG-HANDED SPONGE SOAP
GRAB BARS

NO SLIP SHOWER MAT

RAISED TOILET SEAT
Online Resources


Creating a Safer Home:

Fall Prevention Checklist:

Treatments for arthritis:
- includes things you can do at home

Equipment:
- http://www.unitedseating.com/store/
  ○ check out: ‘walking aids’, bathroom safety equipment’, and ‘daily living aids’
- http://www.homedepot.com/webapp/catalog/servlet/ContentView?pn=SPC_BA_SimpleEasyLiving&storeId=10051&langId=-1&catalogId=10053
  ○ shop by type of equipment, your specific needs, or by room
  ○ they also have a page of frequently asked questions and ways to get started
  ○ extensive catalogue of medical and safety equipment
  ○ check out: ‘aids to daily living’, ‘bath safety’, ‘braces and supports’, ‘orthotics’, walking aids’, and many others
References


