

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
 - when going up stairs, start with your less painful, or “good” leg, and follow with the more painful, or “bad” leg
 - 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
 - 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

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

Example Pictures of Equipment

RUG TACKING



LOOSE CARPET



NON-SLIP STRIPS FOR STAIRS



STEP STOOL WITH BAR DISPENSER

LONG-HANDLED SPONGE

SOAP



GRAB BARS



NO SLIP SHOWER MAT



RAISED TOILET SEAT



Online Resources

Lifting Techniques: <http://www.yorku.ca/dohs/documents/armylift.pdf>

Creating a Safer Home:

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/osteoarthritis/creating-a-safe-home.aspx>

Fall Prevention Checklist:

http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/booklet_Eng_desktop-a.pdf

Treatments for arthritis:

<http://www.homemodificationsolutions.com/resource-center/medical-health-issues.aspx?issue=arthritis&tid=216>

- 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
- <http://www.medmarketplace.com/BuyMedicalEquipment.aspx>
 - extensive catalogue of medical and safety equipment
 - check out: 'aids to daily living', 'bath safety', 'braces and supports', 'orthotics', walking aids', and many others
- <http://www.walgreens.com/store/c/home-medical-supplies-and-equipment/ID=359443-tier1?tab=home%20medical%20supplies%20%26%20equipment>
 - check out: 'walkers and rollators', 'canes & crutches', bathroom safety', 'daily living aids', 'bedding & accessories', and 'supports & braces'

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