

PREVENTING FALLS

For Sixty-plus Adults



An Alameda County Collaborative

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SIPP Mission Statement

To reduce the number of preventable injuries to older adults in Alameda County and to raise awareness regarding the need for county-wide older adult injury prevention programs.

FALLS PREVENTION MANUAL

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SPA GENERATION

(SIXTY-PLUS ADULTS)

CHANGING BEHAVIORS TO PREVENT FALLS



*Falls can be caused by habits
created over a lifetime.*



As we age it becomes crucial to assess our daily activities to determine if they are putting us at risk of falling. We can then find safer ways to accomplish these daily tasks. Most importantly, we have to retrain ourselves and use our minds to protect our bodies.

This is a partial list of common behaviors that can increase your risk of falling and some suggestions for alternatives.

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ If you find yourself walking too fast or running in order to be on time . . . try planning ahead so there's no need to hurry. Slowing down will help you maintain an upright posture.
- ❑ If you get overtired by trying to do too much . . . try planning your week so daily chores are evenly distributed. Learn to say "no" to less important activities.
- ❑ Wearing clothes that drag on the floor can cause trips and falls . . . hem or cut off clothes that are too long. Some skirts can be rolled up at the waist.
- ❑ If you notice that you are using a rocking motion to help you stand . . . try moving to the front of the chair - feet flat on the floor under your shoulders. Use chair arms and leg power to lean forward and stand.
- ❑ If you wear sunglasses . . . remove them when entering lowlight areas, take a moment to let your eyes adjust.
- ❑ If you have pets that get underfoot . . . be aware of the pets' location. Consider moving pet to another room or outside during standing activities (cooking, ironing, etc.)

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- Even if you don't think you need to use handrails . . .** they provide a safety precaution in case you trip. Always leave one hand free and hold onto the handrail.
- Drawers or doors that stick when you try to open them can cause you to lose your balance and fall . . .** edges can be sanded or planed to make them work smoothly.
- Walking in one direction while looking elsewhere (window shopping) can cause trips and falls . . .** stop walking to observe your surroundings. When moving keep focused on where you are putting your feet.
- Moving from sitting - to standing - to walking in a rush can cause dizziness . . .** take time to raise legs/arms a few times, stand slowly. Once standing, take a full breath, relax and “get bearings” before moving on.
- The wrong shoes or slippers can cause a fall . . .** wear low heeled thin soled enclosed shoes. Slippers should be non-skid. Socks are too slippery to wear alone.
- Leaning on furniture for support can be dangerous . . .** obtain a cane or walker and get training in proper use.

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ Towel bars will not support body weight . . . have grab bars properly installed where needed.
- ❑ Sitting in chairs with your buttocks lower than your knees makes it difficult to stand up . . . replace low chairs or add cushions to raise seat height.
- ❑ If you experience dizziness . . . sit down immediately, take slow deep breaths, exhale fully. Discuss dizziness with your doctor.
- ❑ Getting arms/legs tangled in clothing while changing can cause a fall . . . sit down while changing clothes.
- ❑ Carrying packages that block your view of your feet can cause you to trip . . . ask for assistance. Know where you are placing your feet and keep them in clear sight. Reduce your load and make more trips if necessary.
- ❑ If you wear eyeglasses . . . clean glasses regularly. Have vision checks every year. Use extra care when walking and wearing bi-focals or tri-focals, they can hinder depth perception.
- ❑ If you travel . . . take a flashlight to keep next to your bed.

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- Never skip meals . . .** a healthy diet is necessary in order to maintain strength, think clearly, and assimilate medications properly.
- Improper use of medications can cause many problems . . .** always take medications as directed (time intervals and dosage). **ALWAYS** discuss **ANY** medication with your doctor. Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know all the medications you're taking including herbal remedies.
- A new mattress can be so high that when sitting on the bed your feet are not firmly on the floor, leaning over can cause a fall off the bed . . .** sit in a chair to put on your shoes.
- Doing several tasks at the same time can be distracting and disorienting . . .** slow down, focus completely on one task at a time.
- Even a small spill can cause a fall . . .** wipe spills up right away.
- Using low watt light bulbs can result in dark corners and shadows . . .** maintain adequate lighting both indoors and outdoors.



SPA GENERATION

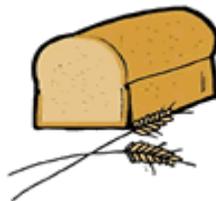
(SIXTY-PLUS ADULTS)



NUTRITION AND MEDICATION MANAGEMENT



According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity beat smoking as the leading causes of death in this country.



The typical American diet is too high in saturated fats, cholesterol, salt and refined sugar, and too low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, calcium and fiber. Such a diet increases the risk of numerous diseases including:

- ⇒ Heart Disease
- ⇒ Cancer
- ⇒ Strokes
- ⇒ Diabetes
- ⇒ High blood pressure
- ⇒ Osteoporosis

**** For information on nutrition programs, meals sites, cooking classes and senior brown bag services, call the Area Agency on Aging at 1-800-510-2020.**

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ **If you have gained or lost 10 pounds or more in the last six months without wanting to . . .** tell your doctor about the weight changes. Ask for help with planning meals to meet your health needs. (See page 11).
- ❑ **If you are overweight . . .** take a daily walk or sign up for exercise classes. Don't eat out of boredom or depression. Eat until you're not hungry, not until you're full. Try to limit snacks or avoid them entirely.
- ❑ **If you have a problem biting, chewing, or swallowing food . . .** try eating easy foods such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, applesauce. Eat hearty soups, smoothies, or milkshakes. Add gravy to foods to make them more moist. Try hot cereals - they are easy to cook and eat.
- ❑ **Don't skip eating or drinking dairy products each day . . .** if you don't like milk, try cheese or yogurt. Use low-fat milk; add to soups/cereals. If dairy products give you gas, speak to your dietitian or doctor for help. Take calcium supplements if you cannot get 2 - 3 servings of dairy products daily.
- ❑ **Dehydration can cause many problems, including dizziness, nausea and constipation . . .** always drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids, especially during hot weather.

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ If you drink less than four glasses of water each day . . . drink plenty of non-caffeinated beverages. Drink a glass of water after brushing your teeth. Ask your doctor for help with incontinence problems.**
- ❑ If you use laxatives more than once a week . . . try drinking water with and between meals. Eat high fiber foods, such as whole wheat breads, and lots of fruits and vegetables. Talk to you doctor if you have problems with constipation.**
- ❑ If you drink 2 or more glasses of beer, wine or liquor most days . . . It is important to remember that alcohol and most drugs do not mix. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist and drink with moderation if you are going to drink.**
- ❑ If you lack enough money to buy food . . . ask family and friends to drop by and bring groceries weekly. Use coupons only for items you would already buy. Large packages only save you money if you can use the entire package.**

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ **If you eat alone most days and don't enjoy it . . .** join a senior center that offers meals. Share the cooking, cost and enjoyment of a meal with a friend. Enjoy watching television during mealtime. Join a cooking class - you can make new friends and get good tips about cooking for one or two people.
- ❑ **If you often feel too tired to eat . . .** ask family or a friend to share a meal with you. Rule out anemia as a cause of fatigue. Medication side effects can also include depression and fatigue. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Spend more time with friends.
- ❑ **If you have an illness or condition that made you change the kind or amount of food you eat . . .** try eating several small meals daily, instead of 3 large ones. Read labels and ask what's in food, especially if you need to reduce calories, salt or sugar. Ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian for help planning meals.
- ❑ **If you are unsure about taking medication before or after eating . . .** keep in mind that many medications have specific requirements about being taken with food or drink. Ask your pharmacist about each medication.

RISKY BEHAVIORS & ALTERNATIVES

- ❑ If you get your prescriptions filled at more than one pharmacy . . . Tell your physician and one pharmacist about all your medications. Ask your pharmacist about possible problems or interactions. Always ask for written instructions.
- ❑ If you take prescription and/or over-the-counter drugs (including herbal remedies) . . . tell your doctor and pharmacist about all your medications. Herbs, vitamins and over-the-counter medicines can be potent and may interact adversely with prescription medications.
- ❑ If you take vitamins . . . know the quantity of vitamins and minerals you are taking. Read the labels. Many vitamins can safely be taken in excess of their recommended amounts but some can cause problems. Ask the dietitian at the local senior center for recommendations. Don't rely on information from the health food store, the internet, or from vitamin companies.
- ❑ If you have trouble reading the labels on your medications . . . ask your pharmacist for large print instructions. Ask a friend or family member to read the instructions to you and take notes. Make sure you understand when and how you need to take your medicine. Try using a pillbox to set aside your medicines in advance so you don't confuse bottles.

SPA GENERATION

(SIXTY-PLUS ADULTS)

FITNESS CHECKLIST



*Exercise is the natural prescription
for healthy aging.*



*Always check with your doctor before
starting or changing your exercise program.*

This section of the Falls Prevention Book offers a few tips on how exercise can reduce the risk of falling. For information from the SIPP Resource Directory on local fitness programs and professionals in your area call your neighborhood Senior Center or the Alameda County Public Health Clearinghouse at (510) 444-2229, or contact SIPP at (510) 618-2050.



Research has shown that the true secret to “successful aging” at any age, is regular physical activity. Exercise will improve your health whether you are nine years old or 90!



For more information and detailed illustrations of safe, easy and effective exercise methods, call the Nation Institute on Aging for a **FREE** copy of their exercise guide at: 800-222-2225.

FITNESS - TIPS

- ❑ **Do you feel unsteady on your feet . . .** balance can be improved by strengthening your abdominal and back muscles. A start to activate these muscles is to draw in your navel and pull your shoulders back while standing and walking.
- ❑ **If you have fallen in the last year . . .** you are at greater risk of falling again. Regular physical activity can help strengthen your body and improve your balance to prevent future falls.
- ❑ **If you become short of breath easily . . .** improving your cardiovascular strength and endurance can help. Practice regular walking and or a continuous movement of your choice (e.g. dancing or stationary cycling).
- ❑ **If you have difficulty walking more than one block . . .** work on improving leg strength as well as cardiovascular endurance, start by walking a short distance daily, then increase the distance gradually.
- ❑ **If you feel isolated . . .** try getting involved in activities in your community. Many senior centers and local fitness facilities have regularly scheduled activities.

FITNESS - TIPS

- ❑ **If you shorten your steps or shuffle your feet . . . practice taking larger steps in a safe environment (on a flat surface, near a stable support if needed). Taking larger steps creates a more stable support base.**
- ❑ **Rounding your shoulders forward (stooping) can cause your posture to deteriorate . . . further deterioration can be reduced by strengthening weak back and abdominal muscles.**
 - **Make a conscious effort to keep your chest uplifted and shoulders relaxed, while pulling your shoulder blades together (visualize pinching a pencil between your shoulder blades).**
 - **Check your posture regularly in mirrors / windows.**
- ❑ **If you have one or more of the following:**
 - * **Hypertension * Arthritis * Back pain * Diabetes**
 - * **Osteopenia or Osteoporosis . . . physical activity can reduce the severity and progression.**
 - **Talk to friends or call SIPP for information on exercise or activity programs in your area.**
 - **Check public television listings for exercise programs.**
 - **Many exercise videos are available to rent or buy.**
- ❑ **If you sit or lie down for most of the daylight hours . . . try to get up and move around every few hours. It's a good idea to go for a walk and take in some fresh air.**

SPA GENERATION

(SIXTY-PLUS ADULTS)

HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

*Most falls happen in and around
the home*





Each year, thousands of older adults fall in or around their homes. Many of them are seriously injured or disabled. Nationwide, in 1997, more than 9,000 people over the age of 65 died of fall-related injuries.

Falls are often due to hazards that are easily overlooked but simple to fix. This checklist will help you find those hazards, both inside and outside your home. It will also offer suggestions on ways to fix or eliminate the hazards.



LOOK AT YOUR STAIRS - TIPS

- ❑ **Check for hazardous stairs, both indoors and outdoors . . . any steps that are loose or uneven should be fixed. Never store items on stairs.**
- ❑ **If you have trouble seeing where one step ends and the next one begins . . . try painting the edge of each stair so that you can clearly see it - use contrasting color like yellow paint on dark stairs. Don't use tape on stair edges, it can become worn and hazardous.**
- ❑ **Unlit stairways are dangerous . . . have light switches installed at the top and bottom of the stairs. Look for light switches that glow. Always have burned out light bulbs replaced immediately.**
- ❑ **Look at your handrails . . . fix any that are loose or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and that they extend slightly beyond the stairs. Make sure your handrail is one that fits your hand so you can grasp it firmly while you walk up or down the stairs.**
- ❑ **If you have carpet on your stairs . . . inspect it to make sure that the carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads on each stair.**

LOOK AT YOUR STAIRS - TIPS

- If you have to climb or stretch to get to items you need . . . try re-arranging your cabinets, store frequently used items on lower shelves.**
- If you use a stepstool . . . make sure it's a steady stool with a bar to hold onto. Never use a chair as a step stool.**

LOOK AT YOUR BEDROOM - TIPS

- If you find it difficult to get out of bed . . . use a firm mattress so it will support you if you push against it. Lower the bed so its easier to reach the floor. Roll to your side and dangle your feet off the side of the bed before getting up.**
- If your bedding drags on the floor . . . when you are getting out of bed be sure to fold the bedclothes back out of the way so your feet won't get entangled when you stand up. Don't use bedspreads with loops or fringe.**
- When you get up during the night . . . make sure that you have a lamp close to the bed where you can easily reach it to turn the light on before you get out of bed. Light the entire way to the bathroom with nightlights.**

LOOK AT YOUR BATHROOM - TIPS

- ❑ **Bathtub and shower floors are slippery . . .** put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub and shower. Consider getting a non-skid shower chair and hand held shower nozzle so you can sit while showering. Use shower shoes.
- ❑ **Getting in and out of the tub or shower . . .** is safer with a grab bar installed in the shower or tub. Never use a towel rack to help you get up as they are not constructed to support your weight. Let the water drain before you get out of the tub so you will have more secure footing. Be sure to use a non-skid bathmat.
- ❑ **If you use bath oils or creams . . .** apply lotions after you get out of the tub or shower. The residue from bath oils and creams can make the floor of the tub very slippery.
- ❑ **While bathing . . .** place all accessories within easy reach so you don't have to bend or stretch too far to get them. Try using soap on a rope.
- ❑ **Standing up from the toilet . . .** is easier when you have a grab bar. You can also purchase raised toilet seats.

LOOK AT ALL YOUR ROOMS - TIPS

- If you have throw rugs on your floors . . .** remove them, or if you must keep them use double sided tape or a non-slip backing to secure the rugs to the floor.
- If you have tile or linoleum floors . . .** inspect them and replace broken or loose tiles; reattach loose linoleum.
- If you wax or polish your floors . . .** use non-skid wax or keep the floors clean and un-waxed. Wait until the floor is completely dry before walking on it.
- Storing papers, books, shoes, boxes, etc. on the floor or stairs creates a tripping hazard . . .** keep floors and stairs clear.
- If you have to step over cords or wires that lay across the floor . . .** coil or tape cords and wires so that they are next to the wall where you won't trip over them. Have an electrician add outlets where needed. Do not put cords under rugs or carpeting, they can fray and cause a fire.
- If you trip over thresholds . . .** they can be replaced with flatter ones. Use care when walking from one surface to another (e.g. tile to carpet) or on uneven surfaces.
- Upon entering a room . . .** try to have a light switch or lamp immediately accessible.

SIPP MEMBERSHIP

Alameda County Public Health-EMS Division
United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County
Alameda County Social Services Agency-Dept of Adult and Aging Services
Alameda County Commission on Aging
Alta Bates Summit Medical Center
John Muir Medical Center
Spectrum Community Services
Vietnamese Senior Center
St Mary's Center
East Bay Korean Community Center
Washington Hospital Healthcare System
Kaiser Permanente
Fremont Fire Department
Fremont Human Services
Alameda County Fire Department
Bay Area Community Services
Vital Link Emergency Response Systems
Alameda County Medical Center
Foundation for Osteoporosis Research and Education
Alameda County Library
American Medical Response
Eden Medical Center
City of Alameda Fire Department
AAI Health Services

This manual created by the Senior Injury Prevention Project

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