

## Take Steps To Prevent Falls

By Arthur Hoffman

Falls are a serious problem for older adults. Many times injury from falls leads to permanent disability, limiting a person's active, independent life. It is estimated that one-third of all persons 65 years and older suffers falls each year. Indirectly, the fear alone may also be harmful. It is estimated that 20% of the elderly who fear falling limit their activities of daily living. Making simple changes to lifestyle and environment can provide peace of mind and prevent the likelihood of falling.

The older population's risk of falling is related to three influences: the normal aging process, pathology that increases with age, and environmental conditions. As people age, there are normal alterations in vision, gait, posture, hearing, and cognition, which may increase the incidence of falls. All are factors that can make a simple trip to the bathroom a potentially dangerous undertaking.

For example, a person may not have the muscle strength or reflex reaction to avoid a fall. Impaired vision may interfere with their ability to avoid obstacles. In addition, the elderly also have a higher incidence of chronic illness. Cardiovascular conditions, neurological impairments, psychological disorders, and metabolic disorders may directly influence a person's functional capabilities. Environmental factors include the person's physical surroundings and medications that put them at risk for falling.

***"One-third of all persons 65 years old and older suffer falls each year"***

Due to the fact that injuries to older adults are more severe because of brittle bones and thin skin, caution should be used at all times, particularly when someone is home alone. Practicing good safety habits and staying alert—even when performing the most mundane tasks can prevent many accidents.



Common sense tells us that although we can prevent many falls, some may still occur.

Personal Emergency Response Systems can act as a safety net to help keep older adults living independently. By pushing a small, waterproof button, help can be immediately summoned. An emergency operator will answer the call for help, assess the situation, and take the appropriate measures. This eliminates the danger and worry of having a fall in and around the home without being able to reach the phone. These systems are very simple to operate. Vital Link has been providing Emergency Response Systems for the past 30 years. They can be reached at 1-800-752-5522 for a free fall prevention DVD or at [www.vital-linkinc.com](http://www.vital-linkinc.com).

*Arthur Hoffman is the Executive Director of Bay Area Vital Link. He has been in the emergency response business since 1981. He is a strong senior advocate and is involved in fall prevention coalitions and task forces throughout the Bay Area.*