

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

Preventing Slips and Falls

It wasn't that long ago that the catch phrase "I've fallen and I can't get up" was popular among a lot of comedians. To members of the youngest generations, the idea seemed . . . silly.

Children fall all the time. Yes, they may cry a bit, they may get a skinned knee, but they bounce right back.

Younger adults fall, too. Riding on a bike or pair of roller blades. Hiking along a trail. They may not bounce right back but, properly equipped with a helmet and other safety items, they suffer no long-term effects. A bruise maybe. A sore muscle. Or, at worst, a cast for a month or so.

It's members of the middle and senior generations who were least likely to find the "I've fallen" line amusing. They're the ones most likely to realize how devastating a fall can be for an elderly family member.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) knows that, too. In its "Falls Among Older Adults: An Overview," the CDC reports:

--More than one third of adults 65 and older fall each year in the United States.

--Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths. They're also the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma.

--In 2005, 15,800 people 65 and older died from injuries related to unintentional falls; about 1.8 million people 65 and older were treated in emergency departments for nonfatal injuries from falls, and more than 433,000 of these patients were hospitalized.

--Twenty to 30 percent of people who fall suffer moderate to severe injuries such as bruises or head traumas. These injuries can make it hard to get around and limit independent living. They also can increase the risk of early death.

--Many people who fall, even those who aren't injured, develop a fear of falling. This fear may cause them to limit their activities, leading to reduced mobility and physical fitness, and increasing their actual risk of falling.

Needless to say, prevention is the key to avoiding falls. The CDC advises that older adults

can take several steps to protect their independence and reduce their risk of falling, including:

--Exercising regularly. (Exercise programs like tai chi that increase strength and improve balance are especially good.)

--Asking their doctor or pharmacist to review their medicines -- both prescription and over-the-counter -- to reduce side effects and interactions.

--Having their eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year.

--Improving the lighting in their home.

--Reducing the hazards in their home that can lead to falls. (Such as safely tucking telephone and electrical cords out of walkways. Keeping the floor clear and clean. Using non-skid throw rugs to reduce the chance of slipping on linoleum or vinyl. And installing handrails in stairways and grab bars in the bathroom by the toilet and in the tub or shower.)

The bottom line here? The bad news is falls can be devastating. The good news is there are easy ways to help a loved one avoid becoming the victim of a simple slip that could land them in so much trouble. □

A Home Safety Checklist for Family Caregivers

For a free printable and downloadable copy of "A Home Safety Checklist for Family Caregivers":

go to: www.youragingparent.com/topics.htm

write: Friends of St. John the Caregiver, P.O.

Box 320, Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043

call toll-free: 1-800-392-JOHN (5646)

e-mail: MonicaDodds@YourAgingParent.com.

Other free available checklists include:

- An Assessment Checklist for Family Caregivers
- Evaluating Housing Options
- An Assisted Living Facility Evaluation Checklist
- A Nursing Home Evaluation Checklist
- Legal and Financial Paperwork
- Caregiver and Care-receiver Depression
- Driving Skills

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