

In-Home Aides Partners in Quality Care

March 2010

March is a time we think of Saint Patrick's Day and the Luck of the Irish, but don't leave your client's risk of falls and fall injuries to luck, be proactive in reducing the risks associated with falls. Falls are not just the result of getting older. Many falls can be prevented.

Falls are usually caused by a number of things!

In-home safety tips:

- Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Have grab bars put in next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Lamp shades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare.
- Have handrails and lights put in on all staircases.
- Wear shoes that give good support and have thin non-slip soles. Avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads.

Do you know how much assistance your clients need - when and where? Do they need to use assistive devices? What help do they need on steps, ramps and/or uneven surfaces – such as outdoors?

Did you know?

- Falls and the problems resulting from falls are a serious health threat for older adults. About one third of people living at home who are age 65 or older, fall each year.

ROLE OF THE IN-HOME AIDE

- Observation- Do you notice anything about the client that makes you think they are at risk of falling?
- Detection- what do you notice about the way the client walks, does the client have scatter rugs that are slippery, does the patient complain of being dizzy or appear unsteady on their feet- these are findings to report to your supervisor.
- Assist with activities such as toileting, transfers and walking- be sure to know the level of assistance the client needs and ask your supervisor for any additional information that you need to help you safely assist the client. Notify the RN if you feel like the patient needs assistive devices such as a cane or walker.
- Encourage the patient to follow the exercise routine or safety precautions taught by the nurse or therapist.
- Be on the look out for safety hazards such as objects in the path of walking, poor lighting, slippery bath tub or shower, etc. and report to your supervisor.



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Did you know?

- About half of all falls happen at home- Most falls occur in the bedroom or bathroom- by knowing this, the In-home aide can be especially cautious in these areas in assisting clients with the tasks as assigned.

Want to share a fall risk assessment tool with your nursing supervisor for her to use with your clients?

Then share this web site:

<http://www.hartfordign.org/publications/trythis/issue08.pdf>



Other Safety Considerations: Older adults may have poor balance or slow reflexes and are more at risk for fractures and other injuries with falls. Also, your elderly clients may have bone diseases or conditions which would make them more prone to falls and fractures. Multiple medications also put elderly clients at risk of falling, as some medications can make a person drowsy or dizzy. Be sure to notify your supervisor if you think your clients are not taking their medications correctly. **Other factors that contribute to the risk of falls are:**

- ♣ Prior history of falls
- ♣ Confusion
- ♣ Age (over 65)
- ♣ Impaired judgment
- ♣ Sensory deficit
- ♣ Functional limitations
- ♣ Decreased cooperation
- ♣ Increased anxiety
- ♣ Incontinence/urgency
- ♣ Cardiac and respiratory problems
- ♣ Certain medications
- ♣ Dizziness
- ♣ Equipment e.g IVs, oxygen
- ♣ Vision problems
- ♣ Environmental hazards



What role does nutrition play in helping to prevent fractures associated with falls?

The foods we eat contain a variety of vitamins, minerals, and other important nutrients that help keep our bodies healthy. Two nutrients in particular, calcium and vitamin D, are needed for strong bones.

Calcium- as you age, you need more of this and vitamin D to keep bones strong and to keep the bone you have. Bone loss can lead to fractures, mainly of the hip, spine, or wrist, in both older women and men.

Major sources of calcium are: dairy products like milk and cheese and foods made with them, canned fish with soft bones like salmon and sardines, dark green leafy vegetables, calcium-fortified products such as orange juice, and breads and cereals made with calcium-fortified flour. Non-dairy calcium sources are especially good for people who cannot use dairy products.

Major food sources of vitamin D are vitamin D-fortified dairy products, eggs, saltwater fish, dark green vegetables, and liver. Some calcium supplements and most multivitamins contain vitamin D, so it's important to read the labels to find out how much each contains.

Sources: *Partners in Caring; The Aide's Role in Helping to Prevent Falls, AHHC, 9/16/04; Marrelli's Guidelines for Care for Home Health Aides; The National Institute of Health; The National Institute on Aging.*