Senior Connection

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SAFETY FIRST

Senior falls may lead to more serious injury

For the elderly population, falls are among the most common cause of serious injury or death in the U.S. However, just because no bones are broken after a fall doesn't mean a senior isn't seriously injured. A recent study suggests that brain injuries are a major cause of death related to falls among the elderly. Because most elderly falls happen in the home and more specifically, in the bathroom, it's important to make homes "geriatric friendly" to help seniors avoid injuries. Cheryl Phillips, M.D., member of the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), offers suggestions to make the home a safer place.

"There are many steps people can take to make their homes safer for those who are aging. Something as small as using a nightlight in a dark hallway can prevent an elderly person from falling during the night," said Dr. Phillips. "Falls are so dangerous to this particular population and there are easy ways to help avoid them."

Suggestions for a safer home

• Remove loose carpets and rugs and put non-skid backing on rugs to avoid tripping. Wear shoes with firm, non-skid soles around the house. Slippers or socks without some type of rubber grip on the bottom can increase the chance of falls. Use nightlights in dimly lit areas, at the top and bottom of stairs, bedrooms and bathrooms.

• Remove clutter, boxes and low furniture around the house and especially near staircases.

• Install hand rails near any stairs in the home or backyard and make sure existing rails are sturdy enough to use.

• Add "grab bars" near the toilet and bath tub, and no slip decals or a rubber mat in the tub or shower.

• Add contrasting strips at the edge of each step to make it clearer where the step ends to help avoid falls.