

Avoiding Life-Threatening Falls

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Steve

Everhart of The Senior's Choice **(CBS/The Early Show)**

Fast Fact

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National Safety Council

(CBS) Taking a fall is always traumatic for adults, but for seniors it can actually be life threatening. A bad fall often means broken bones, a lengthy hospital stay and rehabilitation. In all too many cases, the patient never quite recovers from these injuries.

According to the National Safety Council:

- 70 percent of accidental deaths in senior citizens are a result of falls
- In 2003, more than 15,000 Americans 65 and older died as a result of injuries in their homes
- Falls are the leading cause of unintentional injury among older Americans
- Each week, 30,000 people over the age of 65 are seriously injured in a fall and nearly 250 die from their injuries
- The most common injury is hip fracture. One in four people suffering a hip fracture dies within a year of the fall and another 50 percent never return to their prior level of mobility and independence

- Of those who do survive a fall, 20 percent to 30 percent will suffer debilitating injuries that affect them the rest of their life

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate current annual costs associated with falls suffered by seniors at more than \$27 billion annually and projects these costs will exceed \$43 billion by 2020.

To talk more about these dangers, and how seniors can be better protected, Steve Everhart, president of **The Senior's Choice** joined **The Early Show** Tuesday morning.

The Senior's Choice is a consulting firm that advises and teaches business how to make senior citizens' homes safer and decrease the many thousands of injuries that severely handicap and shorten so many lives.

Everhart recommends the following equipment to create stability **in the bathroom**, where most injuries occur.

- Grab bar
- Commode extender
- Non-slip bath mat
- Tub bench or bath chair
- Handheld shower attachment

Safety tips for other areas of the home

Remove all throw rugs from the house. A throw rug is one of the most dangerous things in the house, according to Everhart, who suggests removing them all from the home.

Remove clutter, like electrical cords, from the floors. Clutter is a big source for falls in the home and electrical cords are often the culprit.

Make sure that all stair railings are sturdy and repaired. Be extra cautious about going down stairs, which is when you have the most momentum. Consider using reflective tape in contrasting colors to make stairs easier to navigate at night.

Use night lights, particularly in bathrooms and in the electrical outlets along the hall, especially in darker areas. Everhart says that as we age we become more farsighted so it's important to have vision checkups at least once a year. And he suggests that every senior keep a flashlight by their bed at night in case of emergency.

Use sturdy chairs. Everhart says to look out for antique chairs with high backs, especially if you need support getting up or down. Chairs with rollers, like old style kitchen chairs, or high backed chairs, like kitchen bar stools, should be avoided.

Avoid high book shelves. Reaching up creates instability, especially if you have to get on a step stool. Everhart recommends moving things that you use on a routine basis to a lower level, and switching things you use less often to the higher shelves.

Beware of long robes and slippers. Long, flowing robes create the danger of tripping, and should be avoided in favor of shorter robes. Big floppy slippers might be cozy, but are not functional for seniors. Use form fitting slippers with a good grip instead.

To see how you can improve the safety of your home, take a look at The Senior's Choice [Home Safety Checklist](#).

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