

Fall Prevention

Falling can be a serious problem, especially since hospice patients can be frail, weak, or dizzy. There are many things that caregivers and patients can do to reduce the chances of falling.

Organize the home to make it safer. Modify these common fall zones for safety:

Bedroom

- Keep a phone and a light within easy reach of the bed.
- Use a nightlight that automatically turns on when dark.
- It may help to use bed-risers or bed-rails to help patients more easily get in and out of bed.

Bathroom

- Install items to help patients stay stable, such as mounted grab bars in the shower and near the toilet.
- Place non-slip strips or plastic chairs in the shower.
- Avoid placing items deep or low in cabinets, and give patients liquid soap with a long-handled brush or bath mitts instead of bar soap. This keeps them from having to bend down too much.
- Automatic nightlights can be helpful.

Main living areas

- Keep cords bundled and out of the way, so no one will trip over them.
- Check rugs and carpets to make sure they don't slip or have loose edges sticking up.
- Keep flashlights in multiple places that patient often accesses, like the kitchen counter or a side table in the living room.
- Avoid sitting down, avoid sitting on low chairs, couches, or beds, and keep a walking aid nearby for getting up.

Stairs

- Make sure there are sturdy arm rails on both sides of the steps spanning the entire length of the stairwell.
- Make sure the stairwell has good lighting and light switches are easy to find.
- Fix any loose or broken stairs.
- If the stairs have carpeting, make sure it is secure, or remove the carpeting and replace it with non-slip rubber treads.

In addition to caregivers organizing the home, patients can also take steps to avoid falls:

- Wear shoes with traction
- Avoid wearing long clothing, like long robes or pants with long hems, which can cause tripping.
- Make sure shoes are always tied, or switch to Velcro-fastened shoes.

Medical equipment can inadvertently lead to falls:

- Make sure wheelchairs are locked or walkers are stable before putting weight on them.
- Be careful with tubing, such as from an oxygen tank. It may be helpful to tape the tubing to the back of a patient's shirt.

If a patient does fall, the patient should avoid trying to get up until they know they are alright. They should shout for help. Let the hospice care team know about the incident. This will help your team better understand how they are doing, what may have led to the fall, and prevent future falls from happening.