

# Preventing Falls at Home



MaineHealth

## Preventing Falls at Home

Falls cause more wounds, broken bones and brain injuries than any other cause of injury, accounting for more than two million emergency room visits each year. Children ages 5 to 14 fall more at home than at school.

Certain health conditions or medical treatments may increase your child's risk of falling. These conditions may require extra attention.

- Nervous system problems.
- Cancer or diabetes.
- Decreased flexibility.
- Inner ear problems.
- Pain that is not well controlled.
- Problems with seeing or hearing.
- Difficulty with walking.
- Side effects of some medications.
- Weakness in arms, legs or on one side of the body.

## What Should I Do

Here is a list of general safety tips to help prevent falls in your home:

- Stay with your child in situations that could lead to falls, such as:
  - » On the stairs
  - » Getting in and out of chairs
  - » Getting in and out of the bathtub

- Have your child wear sturdy, properly fitting shoes with non-skid soles.
- Make sure shoes are tied at all times, or buy shoes without laces.
- Keep pathways free of clutter.
- Keep electrical cords and telephone cords out of the walkways.
- Use throw rugs and bathroom rugs that have non-skid backing.
- Use non-slip mats in your bathtub or shower.
- Clean up spills on floors right away.
- Use non-skid floor wax.
- Use night lights.
- Keep a flashlight and extra batteries near your bed and your child's bed for emergencies.
- Put padding on sharp corners.

## Stairs

- Use good lighting on stairs.
- Add handrails to all stairs (indoors and out) if possible, and teach your child to use them.
- Do not allow your child to play on or near the stairs.

## Windows and Balconies

Falls from windows and balconies tend to result in the most severe injuries; sometimes even death. Children under the age of five are especially at risk. Safety tips include:

- Never leave young children unsupervised around windows, on balconies or on fire escapes.
- Do not let your children play on a balcony.
- Railing bars spaced as little as five inches apart can allow small children to slip through.
- Do not let your children play around windows. Children less than 10 years can fall from a window that is only open five inches. Falling into a closed window can result in injuries from broken glass.
- Move furniture away from windows.
- Install window guards that adults and older children can open in case of fire.
- Window stops can be used instead of guards.  
If a window stop is used, place it so the window cannot open more than four inches.
- If you have double-hung windows, open the top half of the window rather than the bottom half.
- Do not depend on window screens to keep your child safe.  
Screens are designed to keep insects out, not to prevent children from falling.

## Infants and Toddlers

- Never leave infants alone on a high place such as a bed, sofa or changing table. Even very young infants can move toward the edge.
- Always leave the side rails up on the crib. As soon as your baby can pull to a standing position in the crib, lower the mattress.
- Choose baby products that meet required safety standards.

- Do not put your infant in a baby walker. They don't help babies develop walking skills, and they increase your baby's risk of accidents.
- Walk carefully when you carry your baby, so you don't fall.
- If the crib has wheels, make sure that they are locked.
- Use the safety straps on highchairs, swings, strollers and booster seats.
- When using a booster seat, put it on a chair with a wide base. Keep the chair away from a table or other surface your child could push against with hands or feet. Even toddlers can be strong enough to tip their chair over.
- Use safety gates at the top and bottom of the stairs.

## Medicines

- Some medicines can increase the risk of falling. Know about your child's medicines, how they work and what side effects may happen. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if you have questions.
  - Know how to properly measure and give the correct dose of each medicine. Ask your home care nurse or pharmacist to show you how.
  - If your child receives home care services, have your child's medicines handy, your nurse will want to review them.
  - If your child goes to the clinic, hospital or emergency room, bring all current medicines with you. Ask the doctor if the medicines might interact with each other, and whether your child still needs all of them.
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