

PREVENTING FALLS

No-one wants to end up flat on their back, but each year many of us find ourselves swept off our feet. In fact, nearly half of all home injuries are caused by slips, trips and falls, most commonly from steps, stairs and ladders. Often it's not the fall that hurts us – it's what we hit on the way down. Those injuries are usually sprains, back injuries broken bones, cuts, bruising and even concussion that could end up costing you a lot of pain, time and even money. So it sure is worth taking a few easy steps to increase your chances of not falling foul of the stairs.

Ladders and stepladders – Keep your stepladder or ladder in good condition and make sure someone or something keeps it stable when you're up. Never climb higher than the third step from the top of a straight ladder or the second from the top of a stepladder. Never over-reach – your belt buckle must stay in the middle of the ladder, so if you have to reach over further, get down and move the ladder. And if you don't feel confident about getting up a ladder, don't – ask someone else to do the job for you.

Stairs – Keep stairwells clear of obstacles such as toys, sports equipment or surplus bits and bobs. Make sure any carpet is firmly attached and won't trip anyone up. Make sure there's good lighting on the stairs, with a light switch at each end. If you can, install two lights so if one goes, you've still got the second. And always use the handrail!

Loads – Falls often happen when we're carrying something so make sure you can always see where you're going! To be extra careful, carry two small loads instead of one – that's also easier on your back.

Spills – Liquid on the floor, especially smooth wooden, tiled or lino floors, are a big cause of slips. Spills happen, but wipe them up immediately.

Tidy up! – Busy families make a mess, but floors that are littered with toys, clothes, umbrellas, pets etc, mean accidents are just waiting to happen. However, if each family member spends a few moments tidying up after themselves, tripping hazards should be kept to a minimum. This is especially important in high-traffic areas such as hallways, stairs and the kitchen, and if you are expecting an elderly visitor. If your excuse for clutter is you've 'nowhere to put things', think about a clean-out or an upgrade of your storage facilities!

Lighting – Just as you do on the stairs, keep all rooms well-lit and flick on the light switch if you have to go into a dark room – you can never know exactly what's on the floor, waiting to trip you up.

Carpets and mats – If any carpets start curling, fasten them back down immediately. Mats can slip as you step on them, especially if they're on wooden or lino floors, so use non-slip backing or fasteners.

Watch where you're walking – If you know where your feet are and what's beneath them, there's a good chance nothing will catch you out and trip you up!

Don't hurry – How many times have we been injured because we've been trying to save time? Running, hurrying or taking shortcuts oh-so-often just aren't worth the few seconds they might save.

So tidy up, slow down, look down, and save yourself an injury!