

## Preventing falls at home

Falls cause more wounds, broken bones, and brain injuries than any other cause of injury, accounting for more than 2 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 caution:

- cancer
- diabetes
- decreased flexibility
- inner ear problems
- pain that is not well controlled
- problems with hearing or seeing
- nervous system problems, such as seizures
- side effects of some medicines
- weakness in arms or 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 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 nightlights.
- 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 5 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 5 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 5 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 a fire.

- Window stops can be used instead of guards. If a window stop is used, place it so the window cannot open more than 4 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 they are locked.
- Use the safety straps on highchairs, swings, strollers, and booster seats.
- When using a booster seat, put in on a chair with a wide base. Keep the chair away from a table or other surface your child could push against with feet or hands. Even toddlers can be strong enough to tip their chair over.
- Use safety gates at the top and bottom of 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 any 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.
- Have all of your child's medicines handy when the home care nurse comes for a visit. The nurse will review them with you.
- 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.
- Follow the safety instructions on the package insert. For example, if a medicine causes drowsiness or fatigue, your child may need extra help moving around the house.
- For medicines that may cause dizziness, teach your child to sit on the edge of the bed for a minute before getting up.

### **Assistive Devices**

Assistive devices are tools or equipment that help your child do daily activities. When used properly they can reduce your child's risk of falling and increase independence. Some examples are grab bars, shower benches, wheel chairs, walkers, canes, and crutches. Your home care nurse, doctor, or physical therapist can help determine which devices may work best for your child.

### **Questions?**

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call your clinic.