

Managing Fall Risks

Nearly everyone falls at some point, whether or not you're a clumsy person. Yet, as we age, we become more susceptible to injury and bone breakage, so falls are more dangerous for older adults.

Wintertime brings a few extra challenges, like slippery pavement following rain, snow, or ice. Being cold can also be a factor, as the muscles aren't warmed up and ready to help the body counteract a loss of balance. Falling



is not, however, an inevitable consequence of aging. Most age-related falls are preventable once you know why they happen and take steps to minimize the risk for anyone whose age or health makes them especially vulnerable. These considerations can help ensure the safety of those in your care:

- Stay indoors when it is rainy or icy outside.
- People who are primarily housebound are inclined to wear slippers and similar casual shoes for comfort. However, loose-fitting footwear increases the risk of trips and falls. Wearing a sturdy sneaker with proper arch support is a better choice. But if slippers are used, make sure the bottoms have good traction.

(See "Fall Prevention" on page 3)



Dementia-Friendly Holiday Gatherings

The holiday season is a time for joy, togetherness, and celebration, but for individuals living with dementia, it can be challenging and disorienting. Dementia affects the way a person perceives and processes information about their environment. Situations like a houseful of guests, a Christmas tree indoors, and even busy decor around the home can cause confusion for a person experiencing cognitive decline. However, with some thoughtful adaptations, it's possible to create a more inclusive and enjoyable holiday season for both the person living with dementia and their loved ones.

Simplicity is key. Simplify holiday decorations and avoid stimulating visuals. Use subtle and calming colors in your decor and reduce clutter to create a peaceful environment. Bright, flashing lights and intricate decorations may be disorienting for someone with dementia.

Stick with familiar holiday traditions and routines that the person with dementia used to enjoy. Repetition can be comforting and help them feel more grounded. Singing carols, lighting the menorah, or baking holiday cookies can evoke positive memories.

Manage expectations. Set realistic expectations for holiday activities. Understand that a person with dementia may not be able to participate in the same way they used to. For example, if you typically hold a holiday party (even with just a few other families), be mindful that the increased noise level and unfamiliar faces can be overwhelming to someone with dementia. Adapt to their current abilities and be prepared for the possibility that they might not remember recent events or people.

(See "Holiday Gatherings" on page 2)

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Holiday Gatherings *(continued from page 1)*

Engage in sensory activities. For example, a sensory table with ornaments of different textures provides a tactile experience. Listening to classic holiday music or feeling the texture of wrapping paper can be calming and enjoyable.

Consider dietary restrictions and preferences when planning holiday meals. Avoid complex dishes and instead maintain routine with familiar foods. Finger foods can be easier to manage and less frustrating than utensils for people who have declining fine motor skills.

Use memory aids to help the person with dementia stay engaged. Create a holiday scrapbook using pictures of past celebrations that have captions to identify the people; make it specific to the person with dementia such as writing “Susie is Mary’s daughter” to assist in recognition and connection.

Designate a quiet and calming space for the person living with dementia to retreat to if the holiday festivities become overwhelming. Ensure the space is well-lit, comfortable, and equipped with familiar items like their favorite blanket, a cozy chair, and preferred music.

Encourage inclusive conversations by sharing stories and memories. Reminiscing about past holidays can help the person feel connected and engaged in the moment. Be patient and listen attentively when they share stories that you may have heard before.

Limit noise and chaotic environments. If you’re hosting a gathering, consider switching to smaller more intimate events that won’t overwhelm a person who has dementia.

Finally, be flexible and open to change. It’s important to be able to adapt your plans on the spot based on the person’s current needs and preferences. What worked last year might not be suitable this year, so be prepared to modify activities or take breaks as necessary.

Adapting holiday activities for a person with dementia requires a thoughtful, compassionate, and flexible approach. The goal is to create an environment that fosters comfort, safety, and inclusion. By simplifying decorations, maintaining familiar traditions, engaging in sensory activities, and understanding their needs, you can help individuals with dementia and their families find joy and connection during the holiday season. Remember that the essence of the holidays is not the grandeur of the festivities, but the togetherness shared with loved ones. ➤

Fall Prevention *(continued from page 1)*

- Throw rugs, cords/wires, and clutter on the floor are among the biggest trip hazards in the home. Ensure walkways are clear of these items.
- Be extra cautious when walking on uneven ground or inclines/descents. Avoid pathways made with unstable materials like gravel.
- When out and about, using a cross-body purse or fanny pack instead of a handbag will keep hands free to use hand rails while navigating steps.
- Make sure the person in your care receives regular vision checkups to stay current on eyeglass prescriptions. Talk to the eye doctor about whether there's a need for bifocals to help the person obtain the best focus for both near and far. Simply wearing reading glasses all day can leave a person vulnerable to falls if the prescription doesn't provide proper focus for stairs underfoot.
- A person with dementia may be experiencing rapidly declining eyesight that makes it particularly hard to distinguish color contrast and to maintain depth perception. An example of a problem in this realm is when stairs and the ground flooring are the same color/material. In locations you control (like the home), use high-contrast tape or paint to help aging eyes better distinguish stair/curb height.
- Balance problems and muscle weakness cause many elderly people to have a fear of falling. If the person in your care has balance issues, dizziness, or a spinning sensation, a physical therapy referral from the doctor may help. To reduce fear of falling, therapists often have people practice getting up from a lying position. This increases confidence that they can get up if they fall. ➔

Source: *Caregiving in the Comfort of Home: A Guide for Caregivers*

Find 7 Trip Hazards in This Image



Find the answers on the bottom of page 4

QUICK QUIZ

Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Vitamin D deficiency is more common in the winter.
True or False
 2. Dementia can cause problems distinguishing color contrast.
True or False
 3. Dehydration is not a concern in winter because we don't sweat as much.
True or False
 4. Loose-fitting footwear is a major fall risk.
True or False
 5. People with dementia will appreciate you hosting a large holiday party so that they can meet new people.
True or False
 6. Busy holiday decor can be confusing to a person with dementia.
True or False
 7. Balance problems and muscle weakness cause many elderly people to have a fear of falling.
True or False
 8. Throw rugs are among the biggest trip hazards in the home.
True or False
 9. Lowering of the body's internal temperature by even a few degrees can adversely impact biological systems.
True or False
 10. Family caregivers must be flexible and open to adapting holiday plans based on their loved one's current needs and preferences.
True or False
- Find the quiz answers at the bottom of page 4.

Wintertime Considerations for Elderly Individuals

Earlier in this issue, we reviewed inclement weather's toll on walking surfaces this time of year, which poses an obvious danger for aging or frail individuals. But let's look at a few other areas of concern during colder months.

Hypothermia. Lowering of the body's internal temperature by even a few degrees can adversely affect critical biological systems, potentially causing trouble for the liver, kidneys, and heart. So for people who already have diseases that impact these organs, hypothermia can rapidly exacerbate their conditions.

Elderly people who still live independently may lower the thermostat in an effort to save on heating costs, unknowingly putting themselves in real danger. Connect with a local senior services agency or the utility company directly to inquire about savings programs for

seniors to help make proper heating more affordable.

Dehydration. When we're enduring the heat of summer, sipping on refreshing beverages is a natural response. Attention to hydration in winter doesn't come as easily for everyone. Remember that the body is still losing fluid through urination and sweat (even though there's less of the latter this time of year). Now's the time to encourage the person in your care to hydrate with hot tea, soups or cups of broth, and water-dense foods. Alcohol can worsen dehydration, so be mindful of this if a person is consuming celebratory beverages during the holidays.

Seasonal Depression. A lot of seniors already struggle with loneliness and boredom, particularly those who are living with dementia and may be unable to articulate their emotions and needs. Depression can worsen during the winter (or be a seasonal occurrence for some)

because the body is not being exposed to enough sunlight due to weather changes and shorter days. To combat the winter blues, position a comfy chair beside a window that gets good natural light. Schedule time there for reading or listening to music each day. If possible, plan extra uplifting activities for the person this time of year, such as arranging a volunteer visiting musician, crafts that involve bright colors like painting florals, and video calls with loved ones.

Vitamin D Deficiency. With less exposure to the sun, we're also likely to be short on one of sun's natural gifts, Vitamin D, which is needed for bone health. To compensate, ensure your patients are eating a well-balanced diet rich in calcium, such as almonds, dairy, leafy green vegetables, and salmon. Fortified cereal and milk will help maintain Vitamin D, too. Talk to the person's doctor before using a Vitamin D supplement. ➔

Source: National Institutes of Health

Senior-Care Education

Hope Hospice is committed to helping our community offer the best care to seniors. Our experts are available to present complimentary educational seminars to professionals in the medical field and to the public. If you oversee a team of care providers who would benefit from a refresher on such topics as hospice, best practices in dementia care, or any of the



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other subjects listed at right, please connect today to discuss your needs. We can tailor certain lectures to the layperson and conduct seminars for residents of senior living communities, church groups, and the like. We are available to present in-person at your facility or over Zoom.

Available Topics

- Agitation/terminal restlessness
- Advance healthcare directives
- Body mechanics
- Dementia care
- Fall prevention
- Hospice education
- Infection control
- Medication administration
- Nutrition for seniors
- Pain in the elderly
- Respiratory concerns
- Skin care of the elderly

Connect With Us

Contact Delinda Brown, Director of Outreach, to discuss your group's needs. (925) 829-8770; delindab@hopehospice.com.

Answers to Quiz on page 3: 1) T; 2) T; 3) F; 4) T; 5) F; 6) T; 7) T; 8) T; 9) T; 10) T

Trip Hazards Illustration: Area rug, waste basket, cat, laptop cord, shoes, step stool, magazine on floor.