

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Tips for Preventing Falls in Aging Adults”*

Watching our loved ones age can be difficult at times. All the more reason to evaluate their homes or ours and prepare them to prevent tripping hazards and other safety measures. Many falls can be prevented. Preventing falls is something that you want to talk about routinely and work to raise awareness because statistics show that 1 in 4 older adults report falling each year. In Kansas, it's even higher – 29.9% of adults experience at least one fall every single year. This information comes from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's website.

National statistics bear out the fact that an older adult is seen in an emergency room every 11 seconds due to fall. That is an overwhelming statistic. The National Council on Aging recognizes September as National Falls Prevention month in the United States, including September 22 as a single day to raise awareness, and September 23-27 as an entire week to do so.

1 in 5 older adults who fall will experience a serious injury, such as broken bones or a traumatic brain injury. Kansas State University aging specialists, Erin Martinez says, “88% of emergency room visits for hip fractures are due to a fall.” It's often seen that the things contributing to falls are those that we can address.

If you're feeling dizzy or not right, then you should go to see the doctor and perhaps review your medications and possible side effects. Or maybe you're losing body strength or balance, and then there are things around your house that you can change.

Look around your home and consider possible tripping hazards such as throw rugs, furniture, dark areas around the yard, uneven cement, extension cords, and much more potential hazards. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website has a list available online that you can use as a home safety checklist.

Grip bars to aid in getting in and out of the shower are among the assistive equipment available. Solar-powered lighting in the yard is also a benefit when needing to go outside after dark. We don't always want to acknowledge that our loved ones are aging and slowing down, but taking preventative measures and thinking ahead is much better than them coming to harm.

Information comes from Kansas State University aging specialist, Erin Martinez.