



Persons with ALS may be at risk for falling because of impaired mobility or fatigue and precautions need to be taken. Loss of balance, tripping and slipping are common causes of falling and may result in bruises, broken bones, lacerations or head injuries. While many falls do not result in physical harm, falling even once can cause some people to be extremely fearful of engaging in any activities, including leaving their homes. Although not all falls are preventable, there are many ways to eliminate incidents. Below are just some of the measures for reducing the risk of falling.

**To Help Maintain Balance:**

- If you have trouble walking, be evaluated for a cane or walker by a physical therapist and learn how to use it properly. Don't be ashamed to use a wheelchair if one is recommended.
- Always lock the wheels on wheelchairs, wheeled commodes and beds with casters when getting up or down.
- When arising from bed, sit up momentarily before standing and

## Reducing the Risk of Falling

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stand momentarily before walking.

- Place sturdy grab bars next to toilets and shower or tub. Do not grab towel racks.
- To get on and off a commode safely, use a raised toilet seat.
- When bathing, sit on a bathtub bench with a back and armrest; use a hand held shower spray.
- Don't climb on ladders, step stools or other platforms. Get assistance if you need to reach for out-of-the-way objects. Arrange items in kitchen cabinets for easy access.
- Find ways for making your home environment accessible. Arrange furniture in the home to allow for safe traffic pattern. If you have a two-story home, consider living on the first floor.
- Install nonskid ramps over steps, following safety standards of a 1" rise for every 10" to 12" of length.
- The door used for entering and exiting the

home should have a 5' x 5' platform (or accessible surface) outside that door for safe maneuvering.

- Fix wobbly railings. Install sturdy handrails the entire length and along both sides of all stairs and ramps.
- Notify your doctor if you become excessively weak after taking prescribed medication. Avoid drinking alcohol.

**To Avoid Tripping:**

- Walking pathways should be cleared of obstacles, such as throw rugs, toys small tables, extension cords and telephone wires.
- Don't rush to the bathroom or telephone. If possible, consider using a portable commode and cordless phone.
- Avoid wearing long robes and pants that are too long. Keep shoelaces tied.
- Make sure your home is well lighted, especially hallways and stairs. Place automatic night lights in the bathroom and bedroom.
- If you have a dragging foot, be evaluated for an "ankle-foot" brace by

your physical therapist.

- Use special caution if walking on sidewalks and driveways with uneven sections, climbing on deteriorated steps and stepping up or down a curb.

#### **To Avoid Slipping:**

- Wear supportive, properly fitting low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles. Avoid loose-fitting slippers and going barefooted.
- Apply non-skid tub strips or mats in tubs or showers.
- Linoleum floors should be clean, dry and unwaxed.
- If walking outdoors, be watchful of wet or icy pavements and slippery pool decks.

#### **If You Are Home Alone:**

Hook up to your community emergency alert system in which Lifeline Response Centers are widely available. By activating a control button or a VoiceLine, a communicator that you can wear or carry, help is dispatched that may include a relative, friend, police, fire department or paramedics to come to your rescue in the event you fall or need help.

A VoiceLine monitoring service can keep you connected to professionals at your local Lifeline Response Center 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with just a push of a button. Therefore, even if you cannot speak, you can always get help.

Persons who are a high risk for falling should not live alone.

Through simple measures to prevent falls, there is no reason for ALS persons to be confined to immobility and the fear of falling. You can, and must, learn to move safely. And if you do, you can enjoy the freedom to get around, live independently as possible and fulfill life goals. No matter where you live, what you do, or where you go, you can reduce your risk of falling.

#### **References:**

1. Ripley William J. Toward a barrier free home: your entry steps. Paraplegia News, October 1976; 24 -25.
2. Schlapman N. Elderly women and falls in the home. Home Healthcare Nurse 1990; Vol 8, No. 4:20-24

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"Improving the care of people with ALS through research and education in the community"