



Not Your Average Spring Cleaning: Tips for Home Safety

March 15 2012 10:25 AM

Maggie Brorby

By Maggie Brorby

With springtime here, many people might be considering a cleaning project. Most people think of organizing closets or tidying up the garage as “spring cleaning.” However, older adults and their loved ones might want to think of this phrase in a different way this season.

With the 65-and-older crowd being the fastest growing segment of the population, a priority among occupational therapists is the importance of assisting older adults to “age in place,” or live in the place or home of choice. OTs provide services to the young and old with a client-centered approach that includes recommending adaptations for a client’s home in order to foster independence, encourage well-being and decrease the likelihood of further decline or injury.

Education on home safety is a simple yet important way for OTs to support older adults’ desire to remain in their own homes.

With good weather on the horizon, why not take the opportunity to get started on a different type of spring cleaning project, making the home not only clean but also safe and comfortable for you or your loved one?

Home Safety Checklist

- Are your floors free of clutter? Rearrange furniture to provide easy access to rooms, entrances and exits.
- Are your light switches easy to reach and near each doorway? Nightlights are an inexpensive way to provide light to dark passageways at night.
- Are you able to see the edges of the steps clearly? Paint edges of steps white or yellow to see them better or apply contrasting, non-slip adhesive strips to stair edges.
- Can you easily reach kitchen items you use regularly without climbing, bending or upsetting your balance? Arrange your kitchen so the most frequently used items are easy to reach (between hip and eye level). Baskets installed inside cupboard doors can provide extra storage space.
- Do you have handrails or grab bars in the bath and shower? Handrails are recommended in all positions around the bath and toilet. Never use a towel rack to support body weight.
- Can you get in and out of your lounge chair easily? Higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests are easier. Lower chairs where hips are lower than knees in the sitting position can make it difficult to get up.
- Can you easily get in and out of your bed? A firm mattress provides support. This will make getting into and out of bed easier and safer. Beds should be at a good height for easy movement on or off.
- Do you wear shoes with non-slip soles? Shoes and slippers should have non-slip soles with patterned tread and rounded, broad heels.
- Are the paths around the house in good repair? Keep paths free from moss and leaves, and take extra care in wet condition.

You are encouraged to take a look at your own home or that of your loved one with regards to home safety. Take this opportune time to engage in a less conventional form of spring cleaning this year in order to increase your own safety and independence in the home.

For more tips and suggestions regarding home safety, visit the Home Safety Checklist at <http://www.health.wa.gov.au>.

Maggie Brorby is an occupational therapist at Alton Memorial Hospital's Human Motion Institute.