



Eagle's Eye on Housing: Preventing Falls on Stairs - Reduce your risk of injuries at home

Spring 2010

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When seniors fall, the consequences for their health can be both severe and long lasting. Thankfully, many of these falls can be prevented with a little careful planning and a few simple strategies. To help seniors protect their health, mobility and independence, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has a number of tips on how seniors can reduce the risk of falls on stairs at home.

- Avoid visually distracting patterns on the tread (the horizontal part of a step) that can make it difficult to distinguish one step from another. If the edges of the stairs can't be seen clearly, mark them by painting a permanent stripe on the edge in a contrasting colour.
- Improve lighting on steps and stairs. Use lighting that makes the edges of stairs visible without causing glare or strong shadows, and consider installing low-intensity night lighting, as well as a light switch at both the top and bottom of the stairs.
- For steps with short treads or a high rise (the vertical height of a step), keep any coverings thin and tightly affixed to maximize the useable tread space. Avoid soft treads with a large rounding at the edge. If you're renovating or building new stairs, allow for ample tread space and a gentle rise, and make sure all the steps are of a uniform size and height.
- For winding or curved stairs, be sure to provide a handrail on both sides, especially where the stairway includes combinations of rectangular and tapered treads. Handrails are strongly recommended regardless of the number of steps and, where possible, should be installed on both sides of the stairs.
- Steps that are non-uniform in size are an especially common cause of missteps and falls. Consider a partial or complete rebuilding of the steps to make them of uniform size and height. This is very important!
- Use a slip-resistant, rough finish on stairs that are prone to getting wet.
- Make sure to fasten all coverings on stairs securely.
- Don't place any objects or loose rugs on steps, landings or at the top or bottom of the stairway.
- Position handrails at about adult elbow height, and extend them on both sides for the full length of the stairway as well as beyond the top and bottom of the stairs. Repair loose or broken handrails. Ensure that the handrails have a tactile indicator that warns when a stairway is coming to an end, and are easy to see even in low light or at night.
- Lastly, always be cautious, deliberate and not rushed when taking the stairs. Hold on to the handrails, wear shoes or slippers that fit properly and have a non-slip sole, remove reading glasses, switch on stair lights and – most importantly – always take your time, especially when using an unfamiliar stairway.

For more information or a free copy of the "About Your House" fact sheet *Preventing Falls on Stairs* or other fact sheets on owning, maintaining or renovating your home, visit www.cmhc.ca or call CMHC at 1-800-668-2642. For more than 60 years, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has been Canada's national housing agency, and a source of objective, reliable housing expertise.