

# safe zone

A tumble can be potentially serious for seniors. Here are some simple changes you can make at home to reduce the risk of falls **By Sheralyn Tay**

IN CONSULTATION WITH **WONG HUIMIN**, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

If you've ever stubbed your toe on a step, tripped over a rug or slipped on a wet floor, you'll know accidents can and do happen in the home. Home safety and fall prevention is even more critical for seniors, said Occupational Therapist Wong Huimin. Statistics indicate that one in three people above 65 fall each year but many more do not seek medical attention and are not accounted for. Falls may result in mild injuries such as bruising or sprains leading to discomfort and decreased mobility.

Even more worryingly, severe falls may result in broken bones or head injuries and death. Injuries that require a prolonged stay in hospital and/or surgery are not just a financial impact for the family, but have deeper negative consequences. "It can affect physical and emotional wellness," said Ms Wong, "Common problems reported include decreased movement, mood and confidence." This may lead to less social and physical activity, resulting in increased dependence on others, isolation and lower quality of life.

# Fall factors for the elderly

**In older people, falls can occur because of their medical or physical condition (intrinsic factors), or because of the environment or habits (extrinsic factors).**

Ms Wong elaborated, "Falls occur most often in the bathroom, when changing position (from sitting to standing or vice versa; walking; etc.), and at night." Other factors can also increase the risk of falls.

## Medical condition

High blood pressure, Parkinson's disease, chronic dizziness, etc.

## Physical condition

Decreased mobility, muscular weakness, poor vision, etc.

## Environment

Cluttered floors/walkways, wet floors, unsecured wiring/floor coverings, inadequate lighting, etc.

## Habits

Reaching for items beyond arm's length, neglecting to turn on the light when visiting the bathroom at night, etc.

# Tips for household safety

- Opt for 'rocker' switches to ease turning on the lights at home



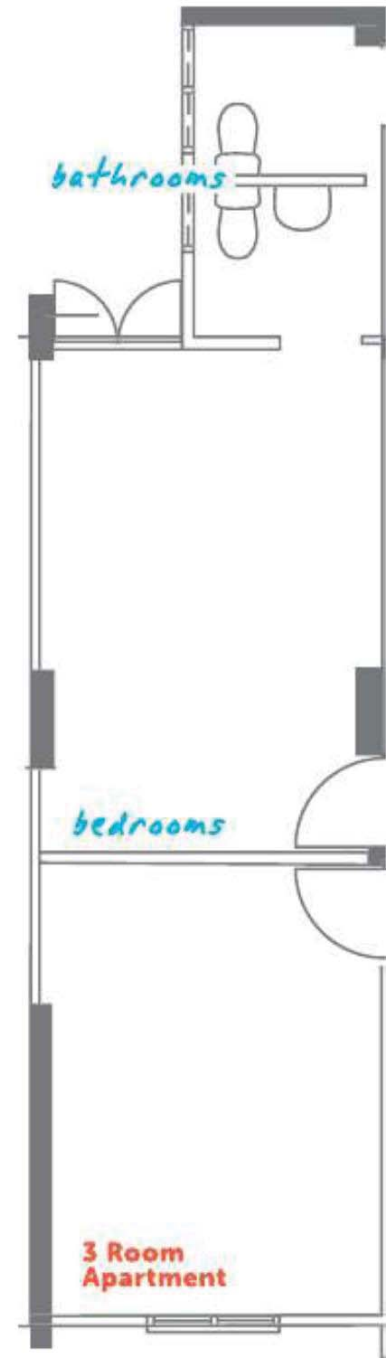
- Use sturdy chairs with a back and arm rest to offer adequate support for sitting down and getting up. The ideal height for a chair/bed is at knee-level. Do not use plastic chairs as these are too flimsy to support one's weight



- Place commonly used items within easy reach. The ideal height is no higher than eye-level and no lower than knee-level. Items should also be within arm's reach without the need to stretch



- Improve safety by using coloured tape in contrasting colours to highlight height differences in the floor (e.g. curbs, steps, risers)



## Fall-free bathrooms

- Use a sturdy bathroom chair or install a shower seat to provide a safe and secure place to rest while showering. Sitting reduces the risk of falls due to slippery and soapy floors
- Use rubberised non-slip mats on the bathroom floor. Alternatively, use a non-slip floor treatment solution
- If using bathroom mats, attach them to a non-slip rubber underlay so there is adequate friction to prevent the mat from sliding
- Install a grab bar in the shower and/or near the toilet bowl. Ensure you secure the grab bars firmly to the wall so they provide stable and safe support



**FIRST AID BOX**  
Ensure your first aid box is within easy reach. Equip it with antiseptics, gauze and sticky plasters to treat minor falls and sprains

## Safer bedrooms



- Place a nightlight or bedside lamp near the bed to help improve lighting in the room, especially at night



- If the bathroom is a distance away, consider using a bedside commode during the night

