**What to look for this Holiday season when it**

**comes to falls and visiting your parents**

We all look forward to visiting and spending time with loved ones. Many of us are traveling to new places to spend the holidays. What should we look for to stay safe or keep our aging loved ones safe from an unintended fall and injury?

*From an article posted on* ***BrightStar Care*** *website:*

Our Chief Clinical Quality Officer, Sharon Roth Maguire, shares her holiday safety tips, including fall prevention tips to help you fall-proof your home, below:

1. **Secure all floor coverings.**

Remove unnecessary throw rugs, especially those that are not secured or skid proof. If your parent is staying overnight, put skidproof mats (and ideally grab bars) in the shower.

1. **Check your chairs.**

Older adults can sometimes fall when getting in or out of a chair. Offer them a chair that’s firmly footed and easy to get into and out of; holiday dinner tables can get crowded, so make sure there’s good clearance around the chair. A pillow at the back or under the seat provides support and comfort.

1. **Clear pathways.**

Reduce, or better yet, remove clutter that can cause stumbles. The holidays can bring a lot of new toys for children—watch out for these, as seniors may not see them and inadvertently trip and lose their balance.

1. **Limit dim lighting.**

We all love the glow of Christmas tree lights and Menorah candles. Enjoy these in short bursts, as dim lighting increases the chances of falls. Also watch out for shadows and glares that may disorient your parent, leading them to misgauge a step or the distance to a chair. [Get more fall prevention tips.](https://www.brightstarcare.com/blog/ideas-for-de-cluttering-for-fall-prevention)

1. **Stay safe when cooking.**

It’s a great idea to involve older adults in holiday activities, like cooking. Give them less injury-prone tasks, such as placing the ingredients in the prep area, or sorting, stirring, or measuring them. (It’s best you handle cutting and chopping yourself.) Don’t ask them to move hot or steaming items from one surface to another—for instance, you might have them transfer cooled cookies into a storage container, rather than remove them from a hot baking sheet. Encourage them to do all cooking activities in a seated position.

1. **Monitor for sound.**

Certain sounds can be overwhelming, confusing, and anxiety-provoking for older adults, especially those with hearing loss. Hearing aids can sometimes heighten background noise, so imagine struggling to pay attention while there are multiple loud conversations and background music happening simultaneously. If you notice your parent withdrawing from the conversation or festivities, this background noise may be why. Try to create smaller intimate conversation spots away from the crowd to enhance his or her enjoyment.

SOURCE: <https://www.brightstarcare.com/blog/holiday-safety-tips-for-seniors>

*Things to Look for When Visiting Your Elderly Parents this Holiday Season:*

1. **Unintended Weight Loss**

One of the easiest-to-spot signs of physical decline in seniors is unintended weight loss. Possible causes of weight loss range from a lack of interest in preparing and cooking food, especially for seniors who live alone, to side effects from medication and serious mental and physical conditions, including cancer, dementia, and depression.

When seniors start losing weight unintentionally, they should schedule appointments with their doctors. If seniors are not taking this worrisome symptom seriously or have refused to seek outside help, their adult children may want to step in. If the problem is health-related, make sure the parent gets the medical care that he or she needs and if it’s a behavioral issue, consider recommending a move to an [assisted living](https://www.heritagewoodsseniorliving.com/living-options/assisted-living-winston-salem/) apartment where healthy, nutritious meals will be provided to residents, no cooking or shopping required.

1. **Balance and Mobility Issues**

Take a look at how senior parents walk, and when. If they are experiencing noticeable changes in gait or obvious symptoms of pain, those can be signs of underlying joint, muscle, or even neurological issues. Lack of balance and a reluctance to get up and walk, at all, can also indicate both physical and mental health issues.

These balance and mobility problems can also place seniors at a higher risk of experiencing damaging falls. According to the [CDC’s most recently released data](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7018a1.htm), around 2.4 million older adults aged 65+ visited emergency rooms across the country as a result of personal injuries, and 90% of those injuries occurred as a result of unintentional falls. Don’t ignore the risk of falls, which can lead to hip fractures and other serious problems.

Unaddressed mobility limitations can also impact seniors’ quality of life in other unexpected ways. When older adults become afraid of falling and injuring themselves, they often stop participating in the activities of daily life and become more withdrawn. This decrease in physical and social activity will only make seniors frailer and even more susceptible to fall injuries, so it needs to be addressed as early on as possible by a qualified healthcare provider.

1. **Damage to Cars or Garages**

Most older adults who live in suburban or rural areas continue to drive well into their retirements, and that’s just fine if they can do so safely. Unfortunately, driving skills are some of the first to decline in old age. Adult children who are worried about whether their parents may be endangering themselves or others by continuing to get behind the wheel should take a peek in the garage to look for issues like dents or scratches on the car or scrapes along the walls.

If there are any signs that a senior’s driving abilities have declined, ask to go for a ride. If the driver is drifting across lanes, slowing down to ridiculously low speeds, or failing to look behind the car while backing up, those are all signs it’s time to find alternative transportation methods. Research options and be prepared for an uncomfortable conversation. Most seniors don’t like the idea of giving up their licenses because it impedes their independence.

1. **Changes in Mood and Behavior**

It can be hard for long-distance caregivers to judge their loved ones’ emotional states over the phone, but it’s much easier during in-person visits. Look for signs of worsening [cognition and mental health](https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/health/info-2019/dementia-warning-signs.html) associated with aging such as increased withdrawal from social activities, loss of interest in personal hobbies, changes in sleep patterns, and obvious issues with basic home maintenance or personal hygiene.

Adult children who notice sudden or unusual behavioral changes in their adult parents, such as confusion and agitation, should help them get medical care immediately. If the changes seem to be part of a general downward progression, consider suggesting a move to a [senior living](https://www.heritagewoodsseniorliving.com/factors-to-consider-when-choosing-an-assisted-living-community/) apartment where older adults can socialize with their peers, get help with medications, and receive dedicated mental health care.

1. **It’s Time for a Change**

When adult children of aging parents need to step in to ensure their loved one’s safety, it’s best to have a suggested plan in place first. North Carolina residents should check out Heritage Woods. This beautiful assisted and independent living [community](https://www.heritagewoodsseniorliving.com/senior-living-community/) offers all the amenities of home while simultaneously giving residents access to the assistance they need not just to stay safe but to thrive in their old age. Learn more about Heritage Woods online or call (336) 768-2011 to schedule a tour.

SOURCE: <https://www.heritagewoodsseniorliving.com/things-to-look-for-when-visiting-your-elderly-parents-this-holiday-season/>

Fall-proofing is not only beneficial for new house guests who are visiting this season. It’s also helpful to people who are familiar with their home surroundings. The [AAOS](https://aaos.org/) and the [Orthopaedic Trauma Association](https://ota.org/) (OTA), whose members treat patients who sustain fractures and injuries from a fall, encourage everyone to consider the following tips to enjoy a fall-free holiday:

* **Reduce clutter.**It’s easy to accumulate clutter, such as boxes of decor and stacks of gifts from holiday shopping. Take the time to declutter your home, especially the hallways and stairs.
* **Designate a play area.** Children may receive lots of new toys for the holidays and scatter them around the house. It’s important to contain those toys in a dedicated play area and clean up the toys after kids are done playing to avoid tripping.
* **Keep walkways clear.** Keep the path between your front door, driveway and mailbox well-lit and clear of debris.
* **Install nightlights.** Keep the halls/walkways in your home well-lit and consider a nightlight in your bathroom. A clear path is especially helpful for family members or guests who are trying to get to the restroom in the middle of the night.
* **Secure all loose area rugs**. Place double-sided carpet tape or slip-resistant backing on all loose rugs around your home including the bathroom.
* **Rearrange furniture.**Ensure no furniture is blocking pathways between rooms.
* **Consider stair gates**. If you have young kids who will be visiting for the holidays, or who live in your home, consider installing child-proof gates at the top and bottom of your stairs to prevent children from accessing them without adult supervision.
* **If a fall happens, do not panic**. Take several deep breaths, assess the situation and determine if you are hurt. If you are badly injured do not try to get up, instead, call for help from a family member or a neighbor. If you are alone when a fall happens, slowly crawl to the telephone and call 911 or relatives.

For more fall-proofing safety tips visit the AAOS and OTA [Falls Awareness and Prevention Guide.](http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/falls/media/AAOSFallPrevention.pdf)

SOURCE: <https://aaos.org/aaos-home/newsroom/press-releases/tis-the-season-to-fall-proof-your-home/>

**Balance University suggestions:**

1. Become familiar with your surroundings, especially in a new environment.
2. If animals are present, make sure you know where they are located before your first step. If you don’t, *ASK!*
3. Know the routes to the restroom at night from your room or sleeping area.
4. *Be cautious!!!*