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SUBJECT: "FALL-PROOFING YOUR HOME." Information approved by agricultural engineers and home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The man who stubs his toe and falls headlong, and the lady who slips on a banana peel may be jokes in the funny papers, but in real life they're often far from funny. Falls send thousands of people to the hospital every year, and cause many deaths. A great many falls happen at home, especially to elderly people who aren't as steady as they used to be, and can't see as well. Life insurance companies report that about 80 percent of the accidental deaths of persons 65 years of age or over are due to falls. But plenty of younger people suffer from falls, too.

You can do a lot toward protecting your family from falls and the suffering and expense that may go with them if you make a drive to rid your home of fall-hazards. It's often easy to make a house very nearly fall-proof.

Here are some suggestions from household engineers and architects and home management specialists to help you.

As you'd expect, more falls happen on steps and stairs than anywhere else in the house. The U. S. Bureau of Standards has specifications for building safe stairs, which are helpful even after a house is built. They suggest a hand-rail for every flight. Be sure all your stairs have a firm hand-rail on one side at least. That goes for cellar and attic stairs, and even for stairs enclosed by walls.

Then, be sure all stairs are well-lighted. It's easy to fall on a dim stairway where you can only half see where you're going. Keep a flashlight handy at top and bottom of stairs if you can't arrange for good lighting. And never try going up and downstairs in the dark. (Even burglars have taken bad tumbles doing that, and they're supposed to be experts at it.) Life insurance companies report that many

people fall on cellar stairs, very often on the bottom step because they can't see well and think they've reached the floor. You can make this bottom step safer by painting it a shining white. Loose boards on steps have caused many falls. Keep yours in repair. Also keep carpeting on steps and in halls in good condition. Worn frayed spots and upturned edges of carpets have caught many a heel and toe. If you finish your stairway with wax, be careful not to wax it so much it's slippery.

Disorder and careless housekeeping has caused many a serious fall on stairs. Brooms, dustpans, wastebaskets, canned goods and all sorts of other things are often left on stairs. And then, of course, somebody trips over them. Needless to say, stairs are not a safe place for children to play. Children themselves are likely to fall downstairs, or grownups may fall over them--or over the toys they leave there. One last point about safety on the stairs: Don't try to carry too heavy a load, and keep one hand free to grab the hand-rail if you lose balance. Life insurance companies have sad records of women who tried to go downstairs carrying a baby in one arm and a bucket of scalding water in the other.

From the stairs let's take a look around the house for other possible fall-hazards.

Two familiar dangers in the kitchen are: food or water spilled on the floor and carelessness in climbing up to high shelves. The traditional banana peel is not the only food that can take you for a terrible slide. Many a woman has gone to the hospital after stepping in a puddle of grease from the stove. Even water on linoleum or oilcloth can be very slippery.

As for high shelves, they're not dangerous in themselves but they tempt people to take dangerous chances in reaching up to them. Don't trust yourself on a chair, a table, or a stool. Have a substantial little kitchen stepladder, and use it whenever you have to get something off the high shelf.

From the kitchen let's go into the living room. A big cause of accidents in living rooms is a slippery floor and small loose rugs. You can have waxed floors and safe floors, too, if you polish them with only a small amount of wax, and give them a thorough rub-down so no soft, slippery wax is left under the surface. Little so-called "scatter" rugs have caused many a fall. You can make them safe by having a pad of some non-skid fabric under-neath, or by using some of the various rug anchors now on the market. Rugs that curl at the edges are also a hazard especially in homes with elderly people.

Now let's have a look in the bathroom. Save your family from falls in the bathtub by putting a strong bar on the wall to grasp if you're slipping. A rubber mat in the tub is a good safety-device, too. And get the family interested in not leaving soap in the bottom of the tub or on the bathroom floor.

Now and then you hear about a housewife who tried to economize by wearing out old high-heeled shoes doing housework--and found it a sad and expensive "economy". One hospital bill is often enough to have bought several pairs of shoes. And there's nothing like high-heeled, rundown, teetery shoes to throw you. Low heels and short skirts are the safest clothes for housework.

Well, that's just a start. Once you get the family thinking about preventing falls, they'll think of plenty of safety measures. They'll be careful not to leave the rake lying out in the grass with the prongs up, and they'll see that the front walk has a good strong rail before slippery weather sets in this fall.

After all, safety is mostly just good sense and good housekeeping.

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