



**ST. LUKE'S**

**IOWA HEALTH SYSTEM**

*For the life of Siouxland.*

## **Prevention of Slip, Trip and Fall Injuries**

Have you ever slipped, tripped, or fallen? Your first thought is always, "I hope nobody just saw what happened." Each of us has at one time taken the plunge by walking too fast on an icy surface, tripping over that crazy crack in the sidewalk or missing a step while taking the stairs. For others of us this may be more of a daily occurrence. Second only to motor vehicle accidents; slips, trips and falls are the most frequent accidents leading to personal injury. According to the National Safety Council (NSC), the major cause of accidental deaths and injuries in America are slip-and-fall accidents.

Most injuries are ligament sprains or muscle strains, but a significant percentage of falls result in fractures to the hip or wrist. Estimates are that 15 to 20 percent of all workers' compensation costs are due to slips, trips and falls. This is not surprising when you consider that the back is the most frequently injured body part in a fall. The average back injury ranges from \$7,000-\$25,000 in direct costs, whereby indirect costs typically double this amount.

There are two basic types of falls:

- Elevated falls- are typically more severe resulting in fractured bones and occasionally death. More than 60 percent of elevated falls are of less than 10 feet. Examples of elevated falls include those from ladders, from vehicles and equipment, from loading docks and falls on stairs.
- Same-level falls- occur most often with lower back sprain/strain and hamstring strain. Most same-level falls can be categorized as slip and fall, trip and fall or step and fall types. In these types of falls the person is injured when he or she hits the walking or working surface or strikes an object during the fall.

The NSC cites fall hazards as hidden steps, smooth surfaces, wet floors, loose or irregular surfaces, oil and grease. Other hazards to be considered include: unsafe stairs, obstructed aisles, improper shoes, moving too fast and poor lighting.

Good housekeeping in work areas can contribute to safety and the prevention of falls. Prevention opportunities include:

- Painting of yellow lines to identify working and walking areas. These areas should never be obstructed by objects of any kind.
- Wear appropriate footwear. The soles and heels should be slip-

resistant. The toe of the shoe should resist crushing injuries (Steel Toe). The shoe should support the ankle and foot by having a good arch support or cushion. You can also purchase arch supports or cushions for your shoes and work boots that will reduce stress to your feet, knees and back. Good brands are Spenco and SOF which can be purchased at many shoe stores.

- Avoid slick surface such as- cool rooms, freezers, deli areas, meat rooms, bakery areas and storage areas. In areas where the walking and working surface is likely to be slippery, non-skid strips or floor coatings can be used.
- Maintain good hip and back flexibility. Increased flexibility allows the body to absorb shock thus reducing risks for injury. You must remember that your body can only protect you from injury if you give it what it needs to protect you- flexibility, strength training, cardiovascular activities, proper daily food choices, water and sleep.
- Don't obstruct vision. Inadequate lighting, wearing sunglasses in low-light areas, moving between areas of different lighting levels and carrying oversized objects can obstruct one's vision and result in a slip or a trip.
- Wear a protective device when working at high elevations such as on ladders, platforms or catwalks. Numerous devices are available including; a protective cage, a lifeline, lanyard, safety belt or harness.
  - Falls from ladders can be prevented by ensuring the ladder is made of appropriate material, is of an adequate length, is equipped with slip-resistant pads, is set at an appropriate angle, is kept clean and dry, and is inspected for cracks, loose rungs, sliver and sharp edges.
  - Falls from vehicles and equipment can be deterred by not allowing extra riders, keeping steps clean and dry, using a handle when stepping up and down and facing the vehicle when stepping up or down.
- Post safety signs where hazards cannot be corrected or removed. Such signs should be changed frequently.
- Establish safety policies and practices in the workplace to reduce the number of injuries and deaths due to slips, trips and falls. Here are some recommendations for consideration:
  - Owners, managers and supervisors must make a commitment to prevent and enforce methods to reduce the risks of accidental slips, trips and falls.
  - Conduct regular and frequent inspections of working and walking areas to identify environmental and equipment hazards which could cause slips, trips and falls.
  - Provide extensive training for all employees on the prevention of slips, trips and falls.
  - Require all workers to wear proper footwear for their work and environment.
  - Prohibit riders on tractors, trucks and other self-powered or towed equipment unless a safe seat or workstation is provided.
  - Report, record and thoroughly investigate all slips, trips and falls. Take corrective action immediately.
  - Encourage and do daily WorkSmart Stretching to increase flexibility and reduce daily fatigue to your working, aging

body.

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