

Don't fall for anything!

I have heard it said "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." I will leave the first part of that to you - but I want to dispute the second part and ask you to please NOT fall for anything!

This is the time of year that people get up on ladders to trim trees, bushes, and clean leaves out of gutters. Also, when we have rain on steps or fallen leaves they can be as slippery as ice. It can be easy to fall but never good to fall - especially if you are elderly, frail, have osteoporosis (fragile bones), or are on any type of blood thinner. Even if you don't hit your head, you can injure ribs, sprain muscles, pull ligaments, dislocate joints, and the most feared complication (besides a head injury) - a broken hip or long bone.

Believe it or not, falling is the second leading cause of death worldwide, and a major cause of personal injury. In elderly or frail individuals, even a fall from standing height can be a significant cause of injuries. Low blood pressure, certain medications, or dehydration can all be causes of or contribute to falls. Also, failing eyesight, new glasses or bifocals, fatigue, and loose or poor fitting footwear are also major factors contributing to falls.

Even more dangerous for an elderly person is not being able to get up and laying on the floor. We have all seen the TV commercial "I've fallen and I can't get up!" This is a real emergency as laying on the floor or ground for any length of time can increase your chances of morbidity (injury or illness) and mortality (death). I know a lady who recently fell at home and laid on the floor for over 48 hours until she was taken to the hospital. Although she had no broken or dislocated bones, by the time EMS arrived to care for her, she was in respiratory distress and developed large, deep pressure ulcers from laying on the floor which will take many months to heal. Reason for fall? She tripped on a rug in her home, and then was too frail and had no help to get up.

The best way to treat falls is the same as most injuries - prevention. Please be careful and pay attention. If you feel unsteady, there is no shame to using a cane or walker. Check your home for loose boards, wrinkled rugs, or things on the floor you might trip over. Watch out for your pets who might get under foot. If you know elderly folks who live alone, check on them often or call them. Medical alert systems are not a bad idea if available.

So, whatever you decide to stand for or against, just please don't fall - for anything!