

## **Preventing Falls – A Few Simple Precautions Can Save a Life**

*(For Open Arms Solutions October 2013 Newsletter)*

One of the most common health concerns among seniors is falling. Every year, one in three adults over the age of 65 will suffer a fall and about 2.3 million will be treated at U.S. hospital emergency rooms for fall-related injuries. When a well-known person falls down, this makes national headlines. Such was the case last month when New York Giants football coach Tom Coughlin lost his 63-year-old brother John to a freak accident. While exiting a taxi at his house after returning from a Giants game, Coughlin fell and hit his head on the pavement. The head injury, combined with his prescription blood thinners, caused a hemorrhage and swelling in his brain and he never regained consciousness. People on blood thinners have to be especially careful – any fall could lead to a potential tragedy.

Many falls occur at one's residence – whether it is a home or a nursing facility – and involve bumping one's head, resulting in mild concussions to severe head injuries. A majority of fractures among older adults are caused by falls, with the most common body parts affected being the spine, hip, forearm, leg, ankle, pelvis, upper arm, and hand. A moment of distraction, hastiness, or carelessness can lead to a life-altering injury, or even a fatal one if a traumatic brain injury is incurred.

Following a few simple precautions can prevent most falls. During an in-home care assessment, Open Arms can help you pinpoint potential hazards and provide recommendations for fixing these problems.

### **Preventing Falls Inside the Home**

- Secure loose electrical cords and put away toys and any other items that are lying around
- Buy bath mats and rugs with slip-resistant backing and secure them
- Do not walk on slippery, freshly washed floors and avoid floor waxes
- Install grab bars and handrails if you are frail or elderly
- Improve the lighting in your home; dim lighting can increase the risk of falls
- Install night lights in halls and bathrooms, and keep a flashlight near your bed
- Store products in easy-to-reach places; use stepstools/ladders only when absolutely necessary and do not climb up on furniture to reach things
- Wear proper shoes with slip-resistant soles
- Use a walker or cane when necessary
- Educate yourself about your medications and any side effects
- Get your vision checked regularly and make sure your eyeglass prescriptions are accurate

### **Preventing Falls Outside the Home**

- Inspect and remove debris and ice from walkways, driveways, porches, and yards
- Inspect and remove debris from lawns before mowing or gardening
- Make sure that ladders are stable and secure before using them
- Install outdoor handrails if elderly or frail

During the holiday season and winter, fall-related injuries increase due to several factors. There are many warnings about too much merriment leading to alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents, but this can also lead to fatal falls. To prevent becoming a statistic this holiday season and all yearlong, think first, be sensible, and follow simple precautions.

**Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Yahoo Sports, NJ.com**