

Caregivers Need a Break!

We'll Be There When You Can't Be

Caregivers are heroes. But providing care can come at a price due to the overwhelming amount of emotional and physical strain of caregiving for injured, aging, sick or disabled family members.

According to *The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office on Women's Health (OWH)*:

- Caregiver stress, especially in women, can take many forms, like frustration and anger in one minute and helpless the next, that can create a cycle of unhealthy behaviors like smoking or drinking too much alcohol, which in turn can lead to serious health problems.
- Other signs and symptoms include:
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Feeling alone, isolated, or deserted by others
 - Sleeping too much or too little
 - Gaining or losing a lot of weight
 - Feeling tired most of the time
 - Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
 - Becoming easily irritated or angered
 - Feeling worried or sad often
 - Having headaches or body aches often
- Some of the ways stress affects caregivers include:
 - **Depression and anxiety.** Women who are caregivers are more likely than men to develop symptoms of anxiety and depression. Anxiety and depression also raise your risk for other health problems, such as heart disease and stroke.
 - **Weak immune system.** Stressed caregivers may have weaker immune systems than non-caregivers and spend more days sick with the cold or flu. A weak immune system can also make vaccines such as flu shots less effective. Also, it may take longer to recover from surgery.
 - **Obesity.** Stress causes weight gain in more women than men. Obesity raises your risk for other health problems, including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.
 - **Higher risk for chronic diseases.** High levels of stress, especially when combined with depression, can raise your risk for health problems, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or arthritis.
 - **Problems with short-term memory or paying attention.** Caregivers of spouses with Alzheimer's disease are at higher risk for problems with short-term memory and focusing.

According to the *American Psychological Association (APA)*, the needs of family caregivers often go unnoticed. Family caregivers may have limited access to their own personal support networks, like colleagues, spouses, children or other family.

Ron Ingber writes in *Today's Caregiver* (December 18, 2018) about **Caregiver Stress Syndrome** as a condition characterized by physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. It typically results from a person neglecting their own physical and emotional health because they are focused on caring for an ill, injured or disabled loved one, because of a number of factors:

- Constant demands that can result in burnout.
- The lack of boundaries between their roles as a caregiver and a spouse, child, or other loved one.
- Unrealistic expectations, thinking that they can do it all and refusing to ask for help.
- Not wanting to be a burden on anyone else.
- Frustration from overwhelming needs of their loved one.
- Financial and other needs.

The Facts about Caregiver Stress Syndrome

Caregiver stress syndrome is strongly associated with negative health outcomes. Between 40 to 70% of caregivers suffer from depression, while many caregivers also have anxiety as a result of the stress associated with providing care. Anger and irritability are also common symptoms of caregiver stress syndrome. The chronic stress may also lead to high blood pressure, diabetes, and a compromised immune system.

Caregiver Stress Syndrome has a significant impact on the lives of those who take care of their loved ones. It can not only impact the mood of the caregiver, but his or her long-term health and wellness. These statistics highlight the magnitude of the problem.

Depression and mental health problems are consistently higher among caregivers than among their non-caregiving peers. This is particularly true for caregivers who are charged with helping someone with cognitive decline. Studies show that 30 to 40% of dementia caregiver suffer from both depression and emotional stress.

Caregivers report that they are stressed and frustrated. 16% of caregivers are emotionally strained, while 26% state that taking care of their loved one is had on them emotionally. 22% are exhausted when they go to bed at night. This shows what many people experience firsthand: the challenges of providing care for a loved one.

Caregiving has a substantial impact on the caregiver's physical health. According to studies:

- 11% of caregivers state that their role has caused their physical health to decline
- 45% of caregivers reported chronic conditions, including heart attacks, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis;
- Caregivers have a 23% higher level of stress hormones and 15% lower level of antibody responses than non-caregivers,
- 10% of primary caregivers report that they are under physical stress from the demands of assisting their loved one physically
- Women who spend 9 or more hours a week caring for a spouse increased their risk of heart disease by 100%;
- 72% of caregivers report that they had not gone to the doctor as often as they should have;• 58% of caregivers state that their eating habits are worse than before they assumed this role;
- Caregivers between the ages of 66 and 96 have a 63% higher mortality rate than non-caregivers of the same age.

This section is referenced / attributed to “According to *The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office on Women's Health (OWH):*” *which it is why it is placed where it is and formatted accordingly. But can stand alone...*

Taking care of yourself helps you take better care of your loved one and enjoy the rewards of caregiving. In fact, perhaps the greatest care a caregiver can give may be taking care of themselves. Here are some tips to help you prevent or manage caregiver stress:

- **Learn ways to better help your loved one.** Some hospitals offer classes that can teach you how to care for someone with an injury or illness. To find these classes, ask your doctor or call your local Area Agency on Aging.
- **Find caregiving resources in your community to help you.** Many communities have adult daycare services or respite services to give primary caregivers a break from their caregiving duties.
- **Ask for and accept help.** Make a list of ways others can help you. Let helpers choose what they would like to do. For instance, someone might sit with the person you care for while you do an errand. Someone else might pick up groceries for you.

In addition, Shelley Emling, writing for *AARP*, (October 18, 2017) has the following tips for coping with Caregiver Stress:

1. **Remind yourself that your work has value**
2. **Find ways to mass communicate** -- Sites such as CaringBridge allow you to send messages to everyone all at once. Other similar sites include PostHope and MyLifeLine.org.
3. **Join a support group**
4. **Get organized.** -- It's essential to know the location of certain documents: Social Security cards, marriage and birth certificates, a [will or trust](#), the deed to the house, and insurance and bank account records. Staying organized will give you peace of mind and leave you better prepared down the road.
5. **Nurture the positive relationships in your life.** -- You may be overwhelmed, but take time to talk with friends and family you are closest to and limit your interactions with negative people.
6. **Give yourself a break.** -- You can't keep going 24/7.
7. **Don't forget to take care of your own health.** -- Sleep, exercise, stay well nourished, drink plenty of water, stay current with immunizations and don't forget to have regular checkups.

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- If you work outside the home and are feeling overwhelmed, consider taking a break from your job. Under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, eligible employees can take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year to care for relatives. Ask your human resources office about your options.
- The National Eldercare Locator, a service of the U.S. Administration on Aging, can help you find caregiving services in your area. You also can contact your local Area Agency on Aging.

Caregiving while avoiding injuries from falls

One of the best ways to take care of yourself, is to recognize that **you can't "be there" all the time**, trying to prevent falls. Caregiving can rapidly become more difficult if your loved one falls and sustains a serious injury, so implementing strategies to avoid a fall is an important focus. For caregivers of Seniors and at-risk-of-falls populations, helping them maintain a healthy, active, independent lifestyle is directly related to the avoidance of falls, and there is an abundance of excellent data, advice and resources on Fall Prevention:

For example, according to research and data from the National Safety Council ([NSC](#)) and the Center for Disease Control ([CDC](#)), some of the main risk factors associated with falls amongst the elderly are:

1. *Recurring Falls:* A history of falls is associated with an increased risk of recurring falls. If an elderly person has already fallen once they are more likely to fall again.
2. *Age:* Risk of falling increases with age, especially for older women.

3. *Living alone*: Elderly adults who live alone tend to have a greater ability to function. However, when you live alone, injuries from falls can be worse especially if the fall results in the person getting stuck on the floor, unable to get up.
4. *Medications*: Many medications can be associated with an increased risk of falling especially if an elderly person is taking multiple medications at once.
5. *Slippery Surfaces*: The most common areas of the home where falls occur are bathrooms & kitchens. Any floor area that is susceptible to water accumulation is potentially dangerous.
6. *Home Layout*: While most falls occur in the bathroom, they also happen in any room where there are uneven surfaces, rugs w/abrupt edges, poor lighting or objects in commonly used pathways (i.e. between the bedroom & bathroom, on the way from the living room to the kitchen, etc.).

There is a wide assortment of advice on how to prevent the chance of a fall, including:

1. *Talk to your doctor*: Review medications that may affect your balance, and get your hearing and vision checked out.
2. *Avoid slippery surfaces*: Most senior falls take place in the bathroom.
3. *Fall-proof your home*: Install raised toilet seats, incorporating grab bars and other supportive structures.
4. *Exercise*: Regular exercise matters for fall prevention as much as it does for cardiovascular health. Frequent walks, participation in exercise program that builds up your balance, strength, and flexibility, such as Tai Chi.
5. *Use assistive devices*: Walkers and wheelchairs, stair-lifts, etc. can facilitate movement while reducing the risk of falls.
6. *Update corrective vision*: Visit an optometrist to make sure corrective vision needs are being met.
7. *Improve in-home lighting*: Ensure that rooms and passages are well lit, install night-lights & motion sensors.
8. *Consider sleeping downstairs*: Switch to a first-floor room.
9. *Talk to your family members*. Although millions of older adults fall every year, less than half tell their doctor or family.

Some good fall prevention resources are:

- Fall Prevention Center of Excellence
 - <http://stopfalls.org>
- National Council on Aging
 - <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention>
- U.S. Center for Disease Control
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/fallcost.html>
- National Directory of Home Modification and Repair Resources
 - <http://www.programsforelderly.com/housing-national-directory-home-modificaton-repair-usc.php>

Likewise, for the those who wish to be an advocate for fall prevention issues, there is robust community with which to become involved:

- Fall Prevention Center of Excellence
 - <http://stopfalls.org/advocacy/>
- National Council on Aging
 - <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/falls-free-initiative/>

Dose of Reality

Even with so much well-deserved, appropriate and critical emphasis on fall prevention, the reality is that falls still occur. Consider that it isn't the fall that can cause a life changing event, it's the landing! Preventing a fall is one thing, preventing a fall-related injury is something else altogether. So, please DON'T FALL, but if you do DON'T BREAK.

The Missing Resource

When it comes to resources for caregivers on how to prevent falls, there are plenty. But if the objective is "DON'T BREAK", (perhaps the most important component of retaining independence as a senior) wide dissemination of knowledge comparatively thin. An answer: Fall Protection Flooring. The logic is simple. If falling on a hard surface can cause impact-related injuries (breaks, concussions, contusions, skin tears, etc.) then falling on a softer surface can reduce impact related injuries. More on that, later in this article.

Many are fortunate enough to walk away from a fall, but for those who sustain an injury the statistics are sobering:

- About one-third of the senior population over the age of 65 falls each year, and two-thirds of those fallers will fall again within 6 months.
- Falls are the leading cause of death from injury among people 65 and older, and the risk of falls increases proportionately with age. At 80 years, over half of seniors fall annually. Falls account for 87% of all fractures among people aged 65 years or older.
- 20% of those who fall and break a hip or suffer a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), die within six months of the injury. That's about one every 19 minutes.
- Hospitalization after a fall leaves the elderly more vulnerable to hospital-acquired infections, such as pneumonia, sepsis, C. diff, and catheter-associated urinary tract infections (UTIs). Matters can be complicated further if an infection is resistant to commonly used antibiotic drugs.
- About half of all seniors hospitalized for hip fracture cannot return home or live independently after the fall. Only 22% of seniors in a University of Mississippi study could handle living on their own after being released from the hospital following a fall.
- Every 11 seconds an older adult is treated in an emergency room for a fall

Even without an injury, a fall or fear of falling can significantly alter quality-of-life, including:

- Limited activities, which increases the likelihood of a fall due physical decline
- Reduced social interactions resulting in depression, isolation, and feelings of helplessness

- Loss of independence

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An article by Eduardo Porter of the New York Times reports that the burden of care for aging relatives is reshaping the lives of millions. About 15% of women and 13% of men 25 to 54 years old spend time caring for an older relative, according to the U.S. Labor Department. Among those 55 to 64, the share rises to 1 in 5 Americans. And 20% of those caregivers also have children at home. More than 45% have full or part-time jobs. Caring for an ill or injured spouse or parent can stunt careers, weigh heavily on marriages, and hinder the ability to open up the next chapter in a care-giver's life.

So, clearly, avoiding fall-related injuries is a high priority. We don't make this point to sow doom and gloom, but to assure you that there is an effective, simple solution that can reduce your stress by protecting your loved one(s) from fall-related injuries and keep them from becoming a statistic.

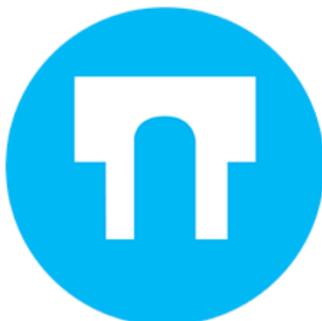
What to do? Here is an answer that can reduce the stress of providing safety and security around fall-related injuries. It is a passive solution that is **"always there" even when you can't be.**

SmartCells® Fall Protection Flooring -- a stable, firm surface proven highly effective at reducing up to 90% of impact forces, while at the same time providing stability for balance-impaired persons and care-givers.

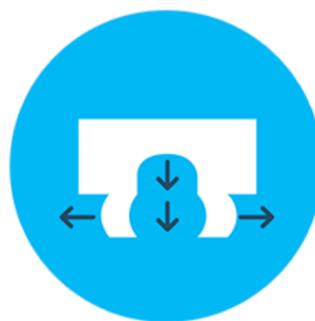
The SmartCells® cushioning technology is a flooring underlayment (under carpet or vinyl) where falls are likely to occur and serves as a "always there" passive intervention, providing security and dramatically reducing the likelihood of fall-related injuries, even when a caregiver isn't present.

Here is how the SmartCells® cushioning technology works. The SmartCells® patented, dual-stiffness structure becomes softer under impact while at the same time providing stability for balance-impaired persons and care-givers.

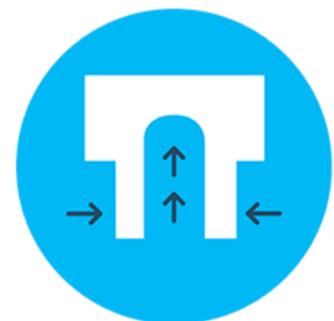
SmartCells® Cushioning Mechanism



Stable at Rest



Cushion on Impact



Energy Return

SmartCells® cushioning technology products have a “resting state” – much like a non-compressed spring – with a natural, supportive, upright force that provides a compressible, soft surface that is also stable and supportive.

SmartCells® Cushioning Products compress and absorb pressure/impact energy from standing, weight-shifting, walking, or from the impact of a fall. After reaching a “critical threshold” the cellular structures soften and collapse laterally, without bottoming out. SmartCells® get softer as force is applied and remain in this cushioned “sweet spot” for as long as the pressure remains.

Like miniature springs, SmartCells® store impact energy until pressure is reduced or eliminated. The SmartCells® resilient rubber material and structure work “in-phase” with body movements to actively rebound, releasing their stored energy back into the body, to increase stability, especially for balance-impaired persons.

Research

SATECH, Inc., the manufacturer of SmartCells® Fall Protection Flooring, has relied on extensive, published external research for all assertions and evidence about the effectiveness of the flooring to reduce fall-related injuries. Typical published, common-sense assumptions are accepted and stated as the foundations of these studies:

- “Preliminary evidence suggested compliant flooring may be effective at preventing fall-related injuries in long-term care.”
- “Controlled laboratory studies have shown that specific types of compliant flooring provide meaningful amounts of force attenuation and energy absorption during impact.”
- “Extensive biomechanical research demonstrates that specific types of compliant flooring provide substantial impact force attenuation without impairing balance or mobility during daily activities.”

Compliant Flooring Research Excerpts:

Dual-stiffness flooring is effective in preventing falls in addition to preventing injuries from falls

- “Results from our study of 1,907 falls provide strong evidence that the compliant flooring we tested does not influence falls in the LTC setting.”
- “...the rate of serious injury on the SmartCells® floor was still 28% smaller than the rate on the control, even with all the limitations mentioned in the study. Additionally, the rate of minor injuries on the SmartCells® floor was reduced by 15%.”

- “Overall, these results suggest that the safety floors we tested effectively addressed two competing demands required to reduce fall-related injury risk; namely the ability to absorb substantial impact energy without increasing footfall deflections. This study contributes to the literature suggesting that safety floors are a promising intervention for reducing fall-related injury risk in older adults.”
- “LIF (Low Impact Flooring) significantly reduced fall-related injuries compared with a standard vinyl flooring, whereas they did not alter the overall risk of falling.”
- “There was a tendency for residents falling on DSF (Dual Stiffness Flooring) to have less bruising and abrasions, while having more redness and cuts. There were 2 fractures on regular flooring (2.4% fracture rate) and none on the DSF flooring (0% fracture rate). The fracture rate of 2.4% of falls on the regular floor is consistent with previous reports in the literature, whereas a 0% rate found on the DSF floor is a clinically significant improvement.”

Compliant flooring reduces impact forces

- “This study demonstrates that during 'high severity' simulated impacts, novel compliant floors can substantially reduce the forces and accelerations applied to a head-form compared to common floors including carpet and resilient rubber. In combination with reports of minimal balance impairments, these findings support the promise of novel compliant floors as a biomechanically effective strategy for reducing fall-related injuries including traumatic brain injuries and skull fractures.”
- “Impact forces were 20–80% lower, and the authors reported that the risk of a moderate head injury (based on Head Injury Criteria) is 5–25% for a head impact on NCF (Novel Compliant Flooring) versus an 80–90% risk on carpet.”
- “With NO Flooring Protection -- A feet-first fall from a bed (most likely scenario) with NO floor protection has an approximate *25% likelihood* of causing severe brain damage.”
- “WITH Flooring Protection -- A feet-first fall from a bed (most likely scenario) WITH floor protection has a *less than 1% likelihood* of causing severe brain damage.”

Specific Fall Protection flooring can have a positive effect on balance.

- “Compliant floors can attenuate femoral impact force by up to 50% while having only limited influence on balance in older women.”
- “This study illustrates that the SmartCells® ... novel compliant floors have minimal influences on balance and balance control responses...caused no impairments in ability to recover balance ...ranked as high for balance confidence and practicality [as normal floors].”
- “While all floors affected postural sway during quiet stance, the effect was most dramatic for Firm Foam, which caused more than a doubling in sway range and velocity. **SmartCells® is statistically indistinguishable from a standard rigid floor.**”
- “Compliant flooring... did not affect risk for falls.”

Dealing with the relentless stress of being a caregiver, carries unique challenges that can affect your personal health and ability to effectively assist loved ones to remain vibrant, productive, healthy and happy and financially secure. Considering the utilization of SmartCells® Fall Protection Flooring can help diffuse some of your stress, help you beat the odds, and reduce the risks associated with Fall-related injuries.

DON'T FALL. DON'T BREAK

Steps to take:

1. **Take care of yourself as the caregiver** -- stay healthy, active and strong
2. **Take advantage of available resources**
3. **Avoid fall injuries with SmartCells fall protection flooring. Contact SATECH, Inc.**
For further information. www.SmartcellsUSA.com