Baby Boomer: You’re getting old. As in ‘OLD’. You may feel you are in older middle age or progressing through your next chapter but as much as ‘thinking young keeps you young’, it also works to keep you unprepared. It may even kill you.

There are some very scary facts that tell us the older we get, the more likely it is we get caught in the downward spiral of physical frailty and financial loss initiated by a single fall.

But not us, right?

We have mental images of elderly relatives in bifocals and hearing aids, stepping out precariously with canes or walkers. Boomers do not relate to this picture, even as we reach for our cheaters, turn up the volume on our TVs and add a knee brace or two to play our regular game of tennis...

A vital attitude and increased statistical longevity have allowed many of us the luxury of the Forever Young expectation. Wobbly old Uncle Fred ends up in the hospital and a nursing home after a fall; it’s the kind of thing that happens to people when they get REALLY old.

A few years ago, I hit a patch of black ice while walking across a parking lot in my tennis shoes. I came down on my ankle, breaking it badly and requiring surgery. I was off my feet for two months, on crutches for weeks and in physical therapy for the entire summer. As a statistic of a Michigan winter, I have a great deal of compassion for old Uncle Fred and an increased awareness of how life changes JUST THAT FAST.
Prepare, Prevent & Recover

The issue is, the older we get the less we are able to prepare to recover from life’s unexpected left-turns. If we Boomers want to maintain our Forever Young lifestyles, we need to strategize now – and put some preparation in place to both prevent old age from taking us down prematurely, and to help us regain lost ground when illness or accidents do happen.

Those of us who are caregivers for elderly parents have had some exposure to this type of preparation. Typically, we are scrambling to outfit an ailing or aging parent’s home to improve safety and reduce the chance of injury. Often, these measures are put in place after a parent’s first bad fall or a diagnosis of dementia.

What if we were proactive about aging in place, and learned we could apply proven interventions that would protect our own futures?

Interventions that offered us Boomers a plan for our physical welfare and a prototype for our safety at home – greatly increasing our odds of making our own choices about how and where we age!

In November 2017, the medical journal JAMA published a ground-breaking new study, titled “Comparisons of Interventions for Preventing Falls in Older Adults”.

Researchers identified four interventions that together, prevented falls in people 65 years and older by 88%, and strongly increased their chances for ongoing health and fitness. A single injurious fall can diminish quality of life and even impact a person’s career, forcing early retirement and crippling a family’s finances. Over 27,000 older Americans actually die each year from falls, and the number is growing as Boomers age into the retirement zone. Let’s bring this reality home:

You are wearing your first pair of progressive bifocals, and your vision is a little distorted when glancing downward. On your way into Starbucks with your laptop you trip stepping up a curb, fall and break your right leg. After surgery, you are not allowed to put any weight on your leg for 12 weeks. Your bedroom is on the second floor, far from the kitchen. Laundry is in the basement. You cannot get into the bathtub. You cannot drive with your right leg in a full cast. Your job does not allow you to work from home. Your health insurance won’t cover a rehabilitative center for your injury. You live alone, with a dog you cannot properly care for while you are situated on the second floor of your two-story house.

A simple fall with life-changing personal and economic ramifications. The four interventions can’t prevent every fall, but they could have mitigated this example, beginning with an intervention as simple as an eyeglass adjustment.
What You Can Do to Save Your Life

INTERVENTION #1: Exercise. Walking should be part of every older adult’s exercise regimen, but this intervention calls for some additional body training. Choose an exercise program that also increases BALANCE, like Tai Chi or Yoga, and goal up to performing moves with flexibility and intensity.

INTERVENTION #2: Vision Assessment & Treatment. Get your eyes checked annually, and update your glasses or contacts whenever your prescription changes. Important: get your new lenses adjusted until you can see without distortion. Use the right glasses for the right job – don’t wear your reader magnifiers to run downstairs to check the dryer!

INTERVENTION #3: Drug & Supplement Review. Do any of your medications cause dizziness? Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about drug side-effects; discuss dosage reduction or alternatives with your provider. Also ask about adding Vitamin D supplements to your diet. Vitamin D may positively affect the neuromuscular system and help gait and balance in older adults – but it needs to work in tandem with other nutrients.

INTERVENTION #4: Environmental Assessment. What can you put in place in your habitat that will reinforce healthy living, while also preventing falls? Turns out, there’s a lot you can do to put the proactive odds in your favor. The key is putting your home in serious preventative mode — a long-term panacea that fosters ongoing environmental health for us grownups. “Your Long-Life Checklist” is your guide; it will help you minimize your risk of falling, while increasing your awareness of the Forever Young importance of safe aging.

YOUR LONG-LIFE CHECKLIST

STEPS & WALKWAYS

YES NO

❑❑ I have a CLEAR WALKWAY through all rooms. Walking surfaces are completely free of:
  - electrical cords
  - rugs
  - boxes
  - furniture (low tables/footstools)
  - shoes/boots
  - pet bowls
  - toys
  - house plants
  - magazines, books, newspapers
  - tracked-in water/snow/ice

❑❑ All FLOORING is in good condition, is flat and uniform, and is slip-resistant or is covered with non-slip carpeting, rugs, or mats.

❑❑ DOORSILLS are painted a contrasting color to prevent tripping.

❑❑ All STEPS are in good condition, have flat, even surfaces and are free of objects that could pose a tripping hazard. (Use reflecting tape at top and bottom of staircase for better visibility.)
All STAIR TREADS are in good condition, and have slip-resistant surfaces such as dense, low-pile carpeting or slip-resistant strips that are securely attached to the steps.

Light switches are located at BOTH the top and bottom of the stairs.

All stairs have solidly mounted HANDRAILS that run continuously along the full length of the stairs on BOTH sides.

Would my home accommodate a walker, wheelchair or wheelchair ramps, if needed?

KITCHEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I keep the items I use most often safely within my reach. (Rearrange high shelves and low cabinets to make your most-used items more accessible at waist-height.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a stable step-stool with a handrail in the kitchen for reaching high items.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BATHROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All bathtubs and showers are equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or surfaces that are not slippery; I have at least one secure GRAB BAR (not a towel bar!).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a hand-held shower head.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I use liquid soap and shampoo in containers that are firmly attached to the wall or in a storage unit inside the walk-in shower or bathtub.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a grab bar next to the toilet, and an elevated toilet seat if necessary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a shower chair or bench that is stable and easy to access in the walk-in shower or bathtub.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bathroom floor is slip-resistant and/or is covered with secure, rubber-backed rugs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All hair dryers, shavers, curling irons, and other small electrical appliances not currently in use are unplugged and put away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BEDROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I keep a flashlight next to my bed in case of an emergency, or if I need to get up at night.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can easily reach and operate the lamp next to my bed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My path from bedroom to bathroom is well-lit with hallway nightlights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bedding does not touch or pool on the floor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BASEMENT & LAUNDRY (also see STEPS & WALKWAYS)

**YES**  **NO**

- [ ] [ ] I can carry a laundry basket safely up and down stairs.
- [ ] [ ] Can my basement washer and dryer be moved to the ground floor?
- [ ] [ ] Work areas, especially where utilities or power tools are used, are well-lit.

GARAGE

**YES**  **NO**

- [ ] [ ] The garage door opens with a remote control.
- [ ] [ ] There are handrails on any steps leading into an attached garage.
- [ ] [ ] Garage floor and driveway pavement are without breaks, large cracks or uneven surfaces.
- [ ] [ ] Garage is brightly lit.
- [ ] [ ] Garage is uncluttered, has easy parking space and a clear access to car.

ENTRYWAY & HOME EXTERIOR

**YES**  **NO**

- [ ] [ ] The outside steps, porch, entryway, and approach to the entryway are slip resistant, in good condition, and well-illuminated.
- [ ] [ ] The light switch is located near the entryway.
- [ ] [ ] Outside steps have handrails.
- [ ] [ ] In cold climates, a covered container of ice-melt is kept near exit doors for porch surfaces and porch steps in winter.
- [ ] [ ] There are motion sensor lights around the outside of my house.

PERSONAL

**YES**  **NO**

- [ ] [ ] I am current with my vision check-up, and have more than one pair of glasses with the correct prescription.
- [ ] [ ] My hearing has been tested and I own and use the correct hearing devices (if indicated).
- [ ] [ ] My medication does not cause dizziness (otherwise, discuss options with doctor).
- [ ] [ ] My house slippers and shoes fit well and have a non-slip sole.
- [ ] [ ] I keep easy on/off ice cleats by my door in the winter to slip on over my shoes or boots (brand examples: YakTrax or Stabilicers – a huge help on icy days)
If I use a purse, it is slim and has a cross-body strap to leave both of my hands free.

I do not walk while looking at/texting my phone.

In an emergency, I know where I can call for reputable home care.