Slips and falls are the most common cause of bone fractures, and fortunately most of these are preventable. The National Floor Studies Institute conducted studies that show that 55% of slip and falls are caused by a hazardous surface and 25% by improper footwear. In the workplace slip and falls account for nearly 20% of all workers’ compensation expenses, or about $36 billion dollars a year in premiums and lost productivity.

Although OSHA only requires our floors to be clean and dry, we have to do better than that. There are a number of floor treatments—such as brushed concrete for outdoors, abrasive vinyl or epoxy with surface aggregate indoors—that are slip resistant. Adhesive strips and chemical etching are also available. Non slip finishes can be applied to marble, terrazzo, and other hard surfaces. Fix crumbling walkways, repair cracks, and replace missing tiles. In the bathroom, rubber bath mats and non-slip throw rugs are a must. In the shop, highly absorbent high-traction mats will make oily surfaces safer. Along with making the surface safe, we must strive to keep it uncluttered.

Safety shoes are generally stiff, ugly and uncomfortable. But, if the steel toe and shank are not necessary, there is a large selection of fashionable and comfortable shoes that are skid resistant (see shoesforcrews.com). At home, although the most slippery foot is the wet bare foot, most of the orthopedic slip and fall injuries we see are in people running in their stocking feet. The safest shoes are lightweight with a low heel and a skid resistant heel and sole. Women should use shoes with straps, men shoes with laces—and, of course, they must keep the straps buckled and the laces tied (I didn’t have to tell you that, did I?). If the tread is bare over an area greater than two pennies, replace the sole.