

Preventing Falls

Falls are a leading cause of serious injuries in older adults that can lead to hospitalization, nursing home admission, and even death. Hip fractures and head injuries are the most common injuries resulting from a fall. However, many falls are preventable with some changes you can make to improve your health, your lifestyle, and your environment.

Falls rarely have a single cause. Usually, a person has several risk factors that combine to make a fall more likely.

The chance of falling increases as we get older. Health problems such as pain, heart disease, muscle weakness, poor balance or vision, foot problems, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and even certain medications can increase your chance of falling. Risky items around the home—for example, slippery throw rugs or poor lighting—make falls more likely as well.

If you are an older adult or helping to care for an older person, please follow the steps below. Also, get a “falls checkup” on a regular basis with your healthcare provider.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a fall

If you fall, let your healthcare provider know right away. It is important to tell them, even if you were not injured.

Think carefully about what might have caused the fall. For example:

- Did you trip over something? Or got dizzy and lost your balance?
- Did you feel your legs “go out” from under you?
- What time of day did you fall?
- Did you start a new medication recently?

Your fall could also be related to a medical problem. A falls evaluation may be needed to find the cause and help reduce your risk of another fall.

Review your medications

Put all of your medications in a bag and bring them with you to your next visit with your healthcare provider. This includes prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, or any other pills that you take. Together you can review your medications to see if any of them might increase your chance of falling. If so, your provider may change the dose or prescribe another type of medicine for you.

Make a falls prevention plan with your healthcare provider

Your healthcare provider may check on your balance, how you walk, and your leg strength. They will also check your blood pressure, heart rate and rhythm, plus your vision and hearing. Based on what your provider finds they may recommend:

- certain exercises
- physical therapy and/or balance training
- a cane or walker
- changing the kind of shoes you wear
- reduce the dose of a medication you are taking to lower your risk of falls

If you have more than one risk factor, it may take more than one visit or conversation to make sure you are working on your fall prevention plan.

Exercise to prevent falls

Healthcare professionals recommend that older adults exercise at least three times each week. A minimum of 12 weeks of exercise is required to begin to reduce the risk of falls.

In addition to aerobic exercise, like walking, find an exercise that you enjoy that also promotes strength and balance. For example, a group Tai Chi class that you can build into your weekly routine.

- ▶ If you exercise at home, chair stands (repeated rising from a chair without using your arms) are beneficial for strengthening.
- ▶ If you need help getting started, ask for a referral to a physical therapist to help create an exercise plan that works best for you.



HAVE REGULAR
EYE CHECKUPS



HAVE YOUR
HEARING CHECKED

Get regular vision and hearing screens

Your vision and hearing are part of your balance. Getting regular checkups, and updating your eyewear and hearing aids can help you stay more balanced and mobile.

- For active older adults, a pair of single distance vision glasses is recommended for outdoor activities. Bifocals or progressive lenses can make changes in surfaces (curbs, e.g.) difficult to notice.
- Your inner ear is part of your balance as well. In addition to making sure you can hear well, make sure to talk to your healthcare provider if you have any dizziness or vertigo. These conditions are often very treatable and treatment will reduce the risk of a fall.

Make your home safe

- Keep cords away from areas where you walk
- Remove loose carpets and rugs or tack down the carpets and only use rugs with non-skid backing
- Add lighting in dimly lit areas and at the top and bottom of stairs
- Use nightlights in bedrooms, halls, and bathrooms and travel with a nightlight
- Clean up clutter, especially near staircases
- Put handrails on both sides of any steps or stairs in or outside of your home
- Add “grab bars” near the toilet and bathtub, and no-slip decals or a rubber mat in the tub or shower
- Wear firm shoes with a back and a good grip on the bottom, even inside your home
- Avoid loose slippers or socks



EXERCISE
REGULARLY



MAKE YOUR
HOME SAFER



GET YOUR VISION
AND HEARING
CHECKED



REVIEW
MEDICATIONS
WITH YOUR
DOCTOR

What do if you fall

If you have already had one fall that resulted in an injury, develop an “In Case of Emergency” plan. This could include using a cell phone that has emergency contacts entered.

Another option is using a wearable device that can detect if a fall has occurred and can contact family or emergency personnel. Always keep your cell phone with you.

Make sure that you practice and know how to get up from a fall safely. If you are not able to get up from a fall, ask to work with a physical therapist or occupational therapist. They can help you learn strategies to get up from a fall.

If you have any loss of consciousness, any sign of confusion, or cannot bear weight without pain, seek immediate medical attention.



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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. July 2024

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