

HEALTHY LIVING



Fall Prevention

With aging, bodily systems that keep us balanced and standing upright require more awareness. You may no longer see or hear as well, for example, which can affect your coordination. Nerves that carry information from your brain to your muscles may deteriorate, slowing your reaction time and making it more difficult to move away from oncoming pedestrians or adjust to icy patches on a sidewalk. Normal declines in muscle strength and joint flexibility can hinder your ability to stand, walk and rise from chairs.

Do not let the fear of falling rule your life, as many falls and fall-related injuries are preventable. Through scientific studies, researchers have identified a number of modifiable risk factors that increase the likelihood of a fall, including medication side effects, loss of limb sensation, poor eyesight, tripping hazards within the home and lack of physical activity.

Consider the following strategies to reduce the risk of falling:

Perform a Home Safety Check

At least one-third of all falls involve hazards within the home. The most common falls occur when people trip over objects on the floor. See the Home Safety Checklist at the end of this handout and work with a family member or healthcare provider to evaluate your home for potential hazards and minimize your risk of injury.

Begin a Regular Exercise Program

Consider a general exercise program that includes strength training, balance training and activities such as walking, water workouts or tai chi, which is a gentle exercise that involves slow and graceful dance-like movements. Exercise reduces your risk of falls by improving your strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.

Review Your Medications

Your risk of falling may increase if you take certain prescription medications. Many medications have side effects that can affect your brain function and lead to dizziness or lightheadedness. Taking multiple medications magnifies the risk, as does combining prescription drugs with alcohol, over-the-counter allergy or sleeping medications, painkillers or cough suppressants. Medications that can increase your risk of falling include psychotropics, antiarrhythmics, diuretics and sedatives. Also, taking four or more types of medications contributes to increased fall risk. Ask your prescribing physician to review your medications and reduce your chances of falling by using the lowest effective dosage. Also, discuss the need for walking aids or supports while taking medications that can affect balance.

Have Your Vision Checked

Reduced vision increases risk of falls. Age-related vision diseases, including cataracts and glaucoma, can alter your depth perception, visual acuity and susceptibility to glare. These limitations hinder your ability to move safely. It is important to have regular check-ups with your eye doctor. Also, regularly clean your glasses to improve visibility.

Nutritional Considerations

Osteoporosis makes bones less resistant to stress and more likely to fracture. Caused by hormonal changes, calcium and vitamin D deficiencies and a decrease in physical activity, osteoporosis is a chief cause of fractures in older adults, especially women.

To help limit the effects of osteoporosis, be sure to eat or drink sufficient calcium. Calcium-rich foods include milk, yogurt, cheese, fish and shellfish, broccoli, soybeans, collards and turnip greens, tofu and almonds. In addition, consume enough vitamin D to enhance the absorption of calcium into the bloodstream. Vitamin D is formed naturally in the body after exposure to sunlight, but most adults need a supplement.

Falls don't have to be a part of getting older. You have the power to stay securely on your feet. A physical activity program, lifestyle changes and home improvements may further reduce your risk. Also, be aware that dehydration contributes to falls, and make sure you drink adequate amounts of water every day.

If you do find yourself falling, you can try to reduce your risk of serious injury. If possible, fall forward on your hands or land on your buttocks – try to protect your head from striking furniture or the floor. If you live alone and are afraid no one will help you if you fall, ask someone to check on you once a day or consider paying for an emergency-monitoring company that responds to your call for help 24 hours a day.



Home Safety Checklist

All living spaces:

- Remove throw rugs.
- Secure carpet edges.
- Remove low furniture and objects on the floor.
- Reduce clutter.
- Remove cords and wires on the floor.
- Check for adequate lighting at night (especially along the path to the bathroom).
- Secure carpet or treads on stairs.
- Install handrails on staircases.
- Eliminate chairs that are too low to sit in and get out of easily.
- Do not wax your floors – or use nonskid wax.
- Ensure the telephone can be reached from the floor.

Bathrooms:

- Install grab bars in the bathtub/shower and by the toilet.
- Use rubber mats in the bathtub/shower.
- Pick up floor mats when you are not using the bathtub/ shower to avoid tripping over them.
- Install a raised toilet seat.

Outdoors:

- Repair cracked sidewalks.
- Install handrails on stairs and steps.
- Trim shrubbery along the pathway to the home.
- Install adequate lighting by doorways and along walkways leading to doors.

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find an ACA chiropractor near you, visit www.HandsDownBetter.org

Additional Resources:

- "Resources for Older Adults and Caregivers," National Council on Aging, <https://www.ncoa.org/center-for-healthy-aging/falls-resource-center/falls-prevention-tools-and-resources/falls-prevention-older-adults-caregivers>.
- "Older Adult Fall Prevention," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/falls/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fhomeandrecreationsafety%2Ffalls%2Findex.html.



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