

Preventing Falls

People do things all the time that may cause them to fall. Falls can lead to injuries and can stop someone from doing what he or she enjoys. The good news is that many falls can be prevented.

What puts someone at risk for falling?

There can be problems in the environment, such as:

- Poor lighting
- Stairs that may be too steep or not in good repair
- Floor surfaces that are uneven—for example, moving from a hardwood floor to a carpet
- Outside surfaces that are uneven—for example, a sidewalk

Falls can also be caused by health issues, such as:

- Balance, hearing, or vision changes
- Muscle weakness or numbness
- Normal aging
- A fall in the past
- Stroke, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, or other problems
- Some medications
- A history of falls

Fear of falling

Some people develop a fear of falling, especially if they have fallen before. People can worry about falling and may stop going out or doing what they enjoy. They may have to rely on others to help them. A fear of falling puts the person at risk for more falls.

Preventing falls

- Use care in the bathroom: The bathroom can be a dangerous place. The floor can become wet and slippery, making it easier to fall. Getting in and out of the tub or shower is a common time for people to fall. To prevent falls in the bathroom:
 - Use nonslip mats or strips in the bathtub or shower.
 - Install grab bars inside and outside of the tub or shower.

- Install grab bars near the toilet for support.
- Clean up wet areas and spills as quickly as possible.
- Keep muscles strong through exercise: Sitting too much puts you at risk for falling! Many exercise programs improve strength and balance. Learn about classes that target health conditions that you might have, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or Parkinson's disease.
- Learn about the medications you are taking: People who take four or more medications may be at risk for falling. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the medications you are taking and any side effects. Make sure you tell your doctor about all the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs, herbal remedies, and vitamins.
- Keep your vision sharp: Poor vision can make it harder to get around safely. To help make sure you're seeing clearly, have your eyes checked every year and wear glasses or contact lenses with the right prescription strength.
- Have your hearing checked: Good hearing helps us notice sounds in our environment that can warn of danger. People who cannot hear well may stay by themselves and be less active. Reduced activity can put you at risk for falling.
- Make your house safer: About half of all falls happen at home. Use bright lightbulbs to brighten dark rooms. Wear secure shoes, not slippers or flip-flops, inside and outside of the house.
- Use contrasting colors at steps or thresholds so you can see them clearly. For example, if your bathroom is painted white, make sure the shower curtain is a different color and the threshold into the shower is a contrasting color. On dark wooden floors, paint the edge of the steps a lighter color.
- KEEP EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS IN LARGE PRINT CLOSE BY.

- A home safety check can help identify fall hazards, like clutter and poor lighting. Look for the home safety checklist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website (www.cdc.gov). Search for “Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist.”

NOTES:



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