

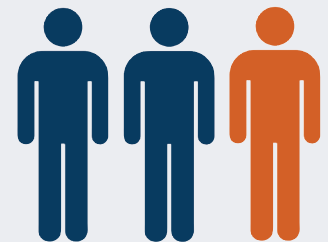


Tips for Preventing Serious Falls

Falls are a leading cause of serious injuries in older adults that can lead to hospitalization, nursing home admission, and even death among older people.

The chance of falling increases as we get older. Health problems such as arthritis, heart disease, muscle weakness, poor balance or vision, foot problems, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and even certain medications can increase your chance of falling. Dangerous things around the home – slippery throw rugs and poor lighting, for example – make falls more likely as well. If you are an older adult or you are in charge of care for an older person, please follow the steps below, and also get a “falls checkup” on a regular basis from your healthcare provider.

Did you know?



One in every three adults age 65 and older falls each year.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a fall

If you fall, let your healthcare provider know right away. It is important for you to tell them what might have caused the fall – whether you tripped over something, for instance, or got dizzy and lost your balance, or felt your legs “go out” from under you. This important information will be used to help you avoid falling again.

Review your medications

Put all of your medications – prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins or any other pills that you take – in a bag and bring them with you to your next visit with your healthcare provider. Together you can review your medications to see if any 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

During your visit, your healthcare provider may also check your balance, leg strength, and function; your blood pressure, heart rate and rhythm; examine the way you walk; and test your vision.

Based on what your provider finds he or she may recommend certain exercises, physical therapy, balance training, a cane or walker, a change in the kind of shoes you wear or in your eyeglasses prescription, or reduce the dose of medications you are taking to lower your risk of falls.

Exercise to prevent falls

Exercise has been shown to decrease falls. Healthcare professionals recommend that older adults exercise at least three times a week. Find an exercise that you enjoy that promotes strength and balance - such as walking or a group Tai Chi class. If you prefer to exercise indoors, chair stands (repeated rising from a chair without using your arms) can be done alone and are beneficial.

Make your home safe from falls

- Keep cords away from areas where you walk
- Remove loose carpets and rugs or tack down the carpets and only use rugs with nonskid backing
- Add lights in dimly lit areas and at the top and bottom of stairs
- Use nightlights in bedrooms, halls, and bathrooms
- Clean up clutter, especially near staircases
- Put hand rails on both sides of any steps or stairs in or outside of your home
- Add “grab bars” near the toilet and bath tub, 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
- Avoid loose slippers or socks

What to Do if You Fall

Get Immediate Medical Attention

Even if you do not have an obvious injury, if you have any loss of consciousness or any sign of confusion after falling, seek immediate medical attention.

Notify Your Primary Healthcare Provider

Even if you have no injury, make an appointment with your healthcare provider. Your fall could be related to a medical problem, and a falls evaluation will be needed to find the cause and help prevent another fall.