

Tips To Avoid Falls and Injuries

More than one in four people age 65 years or older fall each year. Some factors, such as poor hearing or eyesight, loss of muscle mass, balance problems, or even side effects from medications may increase fall risk for older adults. But even older adults who seem strong and healthy can fall.

Try the following tips to help prevent falls, make your home safer, and know what to do if you fall.



Steps To Take To Prevent Falls



Stay physically active. Plan an exercise program that is right for you. Regular exercise makes you stronger and more flexible. Certain types of exercise, including yoga, Pilates, and tai chi can improve your balance and muscle strength.



Have your eyes and hearing tested. Even small changes in sight and hearing are linked to an increased risk for falls. Wear your glasses or contacts as your eye doctor advises. If you have a hearing aid, be sure it fits well and wear it.



Know your medication side effects. Find out about the possible side effects of any medicines you take. If a drug makes you sleepy or dizzy, tell your doctor or pharmacist.



Avoid or limit alcohol. Too much alcohol can lead to balance problems and falls, which can result in hip or arm fractures and other injuries.



Use an assistive device to help you feel steady. Using canes and walkers correctly can help prevent falls. A physical or occupational therapist can help you decide which devices might be better for you and teach you how to use them safely.



Tell your doctor about falls. A fall can alert your doctor to a new medical problem or issues with your medications or eyesight that can be corrected. Your doctor may suggest physical therapy, a walking aid, or other steps to help prevent future falls.



Choose the right footwear. To fully support your feet, wear nonskid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes. Don't walk on stairs or floors in socks or in shoes and slippers with smooth soles.



Get enough sleep. If you are tired, you are more likely to fall.



Avoid going outside in bad weather. Some stores and pharmacies provide 24-hour delivery of prescriptions and groceries, and many take orders over the phone.

Making Your Home Safer

Many falls happen at home. Here are some changes you can make to your home that will help prevent falls and better ensure your safety.



Install handrails. Ensure there are handrails in the bathroom and on both sides of any stairs. Consider installing a grab bar near the front door to provide balance while you are locking or unlocking the door.



Avoid clutter. Don't leave items on the floor or stairs. Keep electrical cords near walls and away from walking paths.



Ensure good lighting. Leave a light on in the bathroom at night or use a night light. Install light switches at the bottom and top of stairs and at both ends of long hallways. Keep flashlights throughout the home in case the power goes out.



Use nonskid material. Use no-slip strips to fix carpets firmly to the floor. In the bathroom, place nonskid mats, strips, or carpet on all surfaces that may get wet. Add no-slip material to indoor and outdoor stairways.



Store regularly used items within easy reach. For example, in the kitchen, keep frequently used pots, pans, and utensils in a place where they are easy to reach. If something is too high to reach easily, use a “reach stick” or ask for help.

What To Do if You Fall

A sudden fall can be startling and upsetting. If you do fall, stay as calm as possible and remember the following steps:

- 1. Breathe.** Take several deep breaths to try to relax. Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling.
- 2. Determine if you are hurt.** Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.
- 3. Crawl to a sturdy chair.** If you think you can get up safely without help, crawl to a sturdy chair. Slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.
- 4. Get help.** Keep a well-charged phone with you or have an emergency medical alert system, which is a special necklace, bracelet, or smartwatch with a button to call emergency services.

To learn more about preventing falls, visit www.nia.nih.gov/falls-prevention.

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