

Tips for Preventing Falls

Who is at risk of falling?

Older adults are at risk of falling. Anyone who has fallen before, has weak leg muscles, or has problems with walking or balance also has a higher risk.

What can happen if you fall?

You can get bruises or broken bones, like a broken hip. Sometimes falls cause life-threatening injuries, like head injuries.

What will my doctor do if I have had a fall?

Your doctor may recommend things you can do to lower your risk of falling again. The following tips can help prevent falls and injuries from falls.

- Tell your doctor if you have had a fall in the past, even if you were not hurt.
- Tell your doctor if you are having problems with your balance or walking, if you have leg weakness, or if you worry about falling.
- If you need a cane or walker, learn how to use it the right way.
- Join a group exercise program that includes strength and balance training. Senior centers, YMCAs, hospitals, and your local Council on Aging may offer these programs.
- Ask your doctor to review the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines, like sleeping pills and pain pills, can make you dizzy or drowsy, increasing your risk of falls.

- Get up slowly when you are sitting or lying down.
- Be careful when wearing multifocal glasses, and do not wear them while climbing stairs or walking.
- Wear shoes that have low heels, close well (such as with laces or Velcro), and have nonslip soles. Don't walk around in slippers, backless shoes, or barefoot.
- Make changes to your home to make it safer.

What can I do to my home to prevent falls?

- Remove rugs, or make sure they don't move by using double-sided tape or nonslip backing.
- Remove clutter and other objects that you could trip on, like cords or wires, from walkways.
- Turn on the lights in hallways and stairways.
- Be sure that handrails are attached well on both sides of all stairways.
- Move items you can't reach to lower shelves and cabinets.
- Use step stools that are steady and have railings to hold onto.
- Put a nonslip rubber mat in the bathtub.
- Install handrails in the bathtub and near the toilet.
- Consider using a personal emergency response system. These systems alert rescuers if you fall or are injured. This is especially important if you live alone.



Tips for Preventing Falls *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Information Resource

<http://familydoctor.org/falls-how-to-lower-your-risk/>

American Geriatrics Society

<http://www.healthinaging.org/aging-and-health-a-to-z/topic/falls/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/falls/adultfalls.html> and <http://www.cdc.gov/steady/patient.html>

National Institute on Aging

<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/aboutfalls/01.html>

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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