

Tips for Preventing Falls

Who is at risk of falling?

Older adults are at risk of falling, but anyone who has had a previous fall, has weak leg muscles, or has problems with walking or balance has a higher risk.

What problems can happen when you fall?

You can get bruises or fractures, such as a broken hip. Sometimes falls cause life-threatening injuries.

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

Your doctor may recommend physical therapy or an exercise program, changes to your home to make it safer, stopping medicines that can increase your fall risk, or wearing different shoes. Your doctor may also check your vitamin D level, because a low level can increase the risk of falls.

How can I prevent a fall?

- Tell your doctor if you have had a fall in the past, even if you were not injured.
- Tell your doctor if you are having problems with your balance or walking, or if you have leg weakness.
- If you need a cane or walker, use it correctly.
- Participate regularly in a group exercise program that includes strength and balance training. Senior centers and your

local Council on Aging or hospital may offer these programs.

- Ask your doctor to review the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines.
- 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 with a low heel, adequate closures (laces or Velcro), and nonslip soles. Avoid slippers, backless shoes, or going barefoot.

What can I do to my house to prevent falls?

- Remove rugs, or use double-sided tape or nonslip backing so rugs will not move.
- Remove clutter, including cords or wires, from walkways.
- Turn on 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.
- Use a nonslip rubber mat in the bathtub.
- Install handrails in the bathtub and near the toilet.
- Consider using a personal emergency response system, especially if you live alone.



Tips for Preventing Falls *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org>

American Geriatrics Society

Web site: http://www.healthinaging.org/agingintheknow/chapters_ch_trial.asp?ch=21

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web sites: <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html> and <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/ChecklistForSafety.html>

National Institute on Aging

Web site: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/toc.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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