

Avoiding falls – tips to break the cycle



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Understanding fall risk

Falls are a real concern for older adults

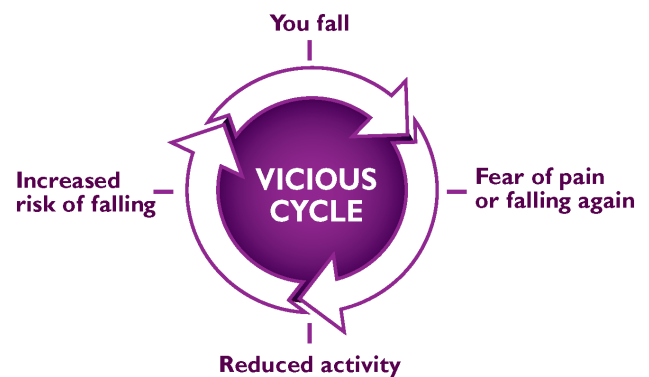
It is estimated that one out of three adults age 65 and older fall each year, and fall rates increase sharply with advancing age.¹ Many of those falls cause serious injury – hip, wrist or vertebra fracture – or sometimes death.² And falls can rob older adults of their independence, often resulting in a move to a nursing home or other supervised living situation.

Fear of falling can increase your risk of falls

Cutting back on physical activity leads to loss of strength, reduced muscle tone, balance problems, decline in overall health, and often depression – all of which makes it more likely you will fall again. It's a vicious cycle.

Help is readily available

Many falls are preventable. The first step is to overcome fear and transform it into actions that help you avoid falls. Talk to your healthcare provider about your concerns, and use the checklist on the next page to learn how to reduce your risk.



1. Promoting a National Falls Prevention Action Plan, Research Review Papers, Stevens, Judy, Ph.D. "Falls Among Older Adults – Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies," page 3.

2. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Falls and Hip Fractures Among Older Adults, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/falls.htm>

Common conditions in older adults increase the risk of falls

Heart disease, stroke, Parkinson's and low blood pressure can cause dizziness, balance problems and fatigue.

Diabetes can cause a loss of sensation in the feet, leading to a reduced "sense of place."

Arthritis results in loss of flexibility and increased difficulty maintaining balance.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and heart failure result in breathing difficulties, weakness and fatigue, even with only slight exertion.

Vision problems, such as glaucoma and cataracts, decrease visual function.

Medications can also be a risk factor, particularly sleeping medications, anti-depressant or anti-anxiety drugs, and heart medications.

Tips to avoid falls

When you say "YES" to these questions, falls become less likely.

Do I exercise regularly?

Yes No

Regular, moderate physical activity increases your muscle strength and balance. Your healthcare provider can provide an exercise program that's right for you.

Do I follow a sensible, balanced diet?

Yes No

Good nutrition results in higher energy. And for stronger bones, remember to include calcium and vitamin D if approved by your doctor.

Have I done a home safety inspection?

Yes No

Eliminate obvious hazards (such as poor lighting, throw rugs and clutter). Add safety modifications (such as grab bars, nonslip mats and night lights).

Do I take extra care?

Yes No

Take your time and think ahead, especially in new or unfamiliar places. When you rise from your chair, stand for a few seconds before walking.

Do I wear the right shoes?

Yes No

Select sturdy, low-heeled shoes with rubber soles for traction. Make sure they are fitted properly.

Has my healthcare provider reviewed my medications?

Yes No

Be sure to report all medications you are taking, both prescription and over-the-counter, so that your healthcare provider can assess the benefits and risks of each drug.

Have I discussed my fears with my healthcare provider?

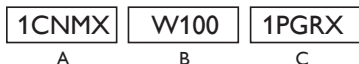
Yes No

Tell your doctor if you've experienced a fall or if you're having dizziness, balance problems or impaired vision. Balance classes, physical therapy or occupational therapy may be recommended to help you walk more safely and to get up correctly if you do fall.

Do I have a medical alert service?

Yes No

Knowing that prompt help is available at the push of a button can give you the confidence to be as active as possible.



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