

Understanding Your Risk for Falls

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Each year, millions of people suffer serious injuries from falls. It is important to understand your risk for falling. Talk with your health care provider about your risk and what you can do to lower it. There are actions you can take at home to lower your risk.

If you do have a serious fall, it is important to tell your health care provider. Falling once raises your risk for falling again.

How can falls affect me?

Serious injuries from falls are common. These include:

- Broken bones. Most hip fractures are caused by falls.
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI). Falls are the most common cause of TBI.

Fear of falling can also cause you to avoid activities and stay at home. This can make your muscles weaker and actually raise your risk for a fall.

What can increase my risk?

Serious injuries from a fall most often happen to people older than age 65. Children and young adults ages 15–29 are also at higher risk. The more risk factors you have for falling, the higher your risk. Risk factors include:

- Weakness in the lower body.
- Lack (*deficiency*) of vitamin D.
- Weak bones (*osteoporosis*).
- Being generally weak or confused due to long-term (*chronic*) illness.

- Dizziness or balance problems.
- Poor vision.
- Having depression.
- Medicine that causes dizziness or drowsiness. These can include medicines for your blood pressure, heart, anxiety, insomnia, or edema, as well as pain medicines and muscle relaxants.
- Drinking alcohol.
- Foot pain or improper footwear.
- Working at a dangerous job.
- Having had a fall in the past.
- Tripping hazards at home, such as floor clutter or loose rugs, or poor lighting.
- Having pets or clutter in your home.

Questions to ask your health care provider

- Can you help me evaluate my risk for a fall?
- Do any of my medicines make me more likely to fall?
- Should I take a vitamin D supplement?
- What exercises can I do to improve my strength and balance?
- Should I make an appointment to have my vision checked?
- Do I need a bone density test to check for osteoporosis?
- Would it help to use a cane or a walker?

Where to find more information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, STEADI: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- Community-Based Fall Prevention Programs: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)
- National Institute on Aging: [go4life.nia.nih.gov](https://www.go4life.nia.nih.gov)

Contact a health care provider if:

- You fall at home.
- You are afraid of falling at home.
- You feel weak, drowsy, or dizzy at home.

Summary

- People 65 and older are at high risk for falling. However, older people are not the only ones injured in falls. Children and young adults have a higher-than-normal risk, too.
- Talk with your health care provider about your risks for falling and how to lower those

risks.

- Taking certain precautions at home can lower your risk for falling.
- If you fall, always tell your health care provider.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

Fall Prevention in the Home

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Falls can cause injuries and can affect people from all age groups. There are many simple things that you can do to make your home safe and to help prevent falls. Ask for help when making these changes, if needed.

What actions can I take to prevent falls?

General instructions

- Use good lighting in all rooms. Replace any light bulbs that burn out.
- Turn on lights if it is dark. Use night-lights.
- Place frequently used items in easy-to-reach places. Lower the shelves around your home if necessary.
- Set up furniture so that there are clear paths around it. Avoid moving your furniture around.
- Remove throw rugs and other tripping hazards from the floor.
- Avoid walking on wet floors.
- Fix any uneven floor surfaces.
- Add color or contrast paint or tape to grab bars and handrails in your home. Place contrasting color strips on the first and last steps of stairways.
- When you use a stepladder, make sure that it is completely opened and that the sides are firmly locked. Have someone hold the ladder while you are using it. **Do not** climb a closed stepladder.
- Be aware of any and all pets.

What can I do in the bathroom?



- Keep the floor dry. Immediately clean up any water that spills onto the floor.
- Remove soap buildup in the tub or shower on a regular basis.
- Use non-skid mats or decals on the floor of the tub or shower.
- Attach bath mats securely with double-sided, non-slip rug tape.
- If you need to sit down while you are in the shower, use a plastic, non-slip stool.
- Install grab bars by the toilet and in the tub and shower. **Do not** use towel bars as grab bars.

What can I do in the bedroom?

- Make sure that a bedside light is easy to reach.
- **Do not** use oversized bedding that drapes onto the floor.
- Have a firm chair that has side arms to use for getting dressed.

What can I do in the kitchen?

- Clean up any spills right away.
- If you need to reach for something above you, use a sturdy step stool that has a grab bar.
- Keep electrical cables out of the way.
- **Do not** use floor polish or wax that makes floors slippery. If you must use wax, make sure that it is non-skid floor wax.

What can I do in the stairways?

- **Do not** leave any items on the stairs.
- Make sure that you have a light switch at the top of the stairs and the bottom of the stairs. Have them installed if you do not have them.
- Make sure that there are handrails on both sides of the stairs. Fix handrails that are broken or loose. Make sure that handrails are as long as the stairways.
- Install non-slip stair treads on all stairs in your home.
- Avoid having throw rugs at the top or bottom of stairways, or secure the rugs with carpet tape to prevent them from moving.
- Choose a carpet design that does not hide the edge of steps on the stairway.
- Check any carpeting to make sure that it is firmly attached to the stairs. Fix any carpet that is loose or worn.

What can I do on the outside of my home?

- Use bright outdoor lighting.
- Regularly repair the edges of walkways and driveways and fix any cracks.
- Remove high doorway thresholds.
- Trim any shrubbery on the main path into your home.
- Regularly check that handrails are securely fastened and in good repair. Both sides of any steps should have handrails.
- Install guardrails along the edges of any raised decks or porches.
- Clear walkways of debris and clutter, including tools and rocks.
- Have leaves, snow, and ice cleared regularly.
- Use sand or salt on walkways during winter months.
- In the garage, clean up any spills right away, including grease or oil spills.

What other actions can I take?

- Wear closed-toe shoes that fit well and support your feet. Wear shoes that have rubber soles or low heels.
- Use mobility aids as needed, such as canes, walkers, scooters, and crutches.
- Review your medicines with your health care provider. Some medicines can cause dizziness or changes in blood pressure, which increase your risk of falling.

Talk with your health care provider about other ways that you can decrease your risk of falls. This may include working with a physical therapist or trainer to improve your strength, balance, and endurance.

Where to find more information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, STEADI: <https://www.cdc.gov>
- National Institute on Aging: <https://go4life.nia.nih.gov>

Falls: How to Lower Your Risk

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This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject.

Keyword(s): falling;patient education;patient information;polypharmacy;slipandslipping

**Information about preventing falls from the
description American Academy of Family Physicians
(AAFP).**

Who is at high risk of falling?

Anyone can fall, although the risk is higher in older people. This increased risk of falling may be the result of changes that come with aging, and certain medical conditions, such as [arthritis](#), cataracts or hip problems.

What can I do to lower my risk of falling?

Most falls happen in the home. Consider the following tips to make your home safe:

- Make sure that you have good lighting in your home. A well lit home will help you avoid tripping over objects that are not easy to see. Put night lights in your bedroom, hallways, stairs and bathrooms.
- Rugs should be firmly fastened to the floor or have nonskid backing. Loose ends should be tacked down.
- Electrical cords should not be lying on the floor in walking areas.
- Put hand rails in your bathroom for bath, shower and toilet use.
- Have rails on both sides of your stairs for support.

- In the kitchen, make sure items are within easy reach. Don't store things too high or too low. Then you won't have to use a stepladder or a stool to reach them. It's also a good idea to avoid storing things too low, so you won't have to bend down to get them.
- Wear shoes with firm nonskid soles. Avoid wearing loose-fitting slippers that could cause you to trip.

What else can I do?

Take good care of your body. Try to stay healthy by following these tips:

- See your eye doctor once a year. Cataracts and other eye diseases that cause you not to see well, can lead to falls.
- Get regular physical activity to keep your bones and muscles strong.
- Take good care of your feet. If you have pain in your feet or if you have large, thick nails and corns, have your doctor look at your feet.
- Talk to your doctor about any side effects you may have from your medicines. Problems caused by side effects from medicine are a common cause of falls. The more medicines you take, the greater your risk of falling.
- Talk to your doctor if you have dizzy spells.
- If your doctor suggests that you use a cane or a walker to help you walk, be sure to use it. This will give you extra stability when walking and will help you avoid falls.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol to no more than 2 drinks per day.
- When you get out of bed in the morning or at night to use the bathroom, sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before standing up. Your blood pressure takes some time to adjust when you sit up. It may be too low if you get up quickly. This can make you dizzy, and you might lose your balance and fall.

Health Maintenance After Age 65

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After age 65, you are at a higher risk for certain long-term diseases and infections as well as injuries from falls. Falls are a major cause of broken bones and head injuries in people who are older than age 65. Getting regular preventive care can help to keep you healthy and well. Preventive care includes getting regular testing and making lifestyle changes as recommended by your health care provider. Talk with your health care provider about:

- Which screenings and tests you should have. A screening is a test that checks for a disease when you have no symptoms.
- A diet and exercise plan that is right for you.

What should I know about screenings and tests to prevent falls?

Screening and testing are the best ways to find a health problem early. Early diagnosis and treatment give you the best chance of managing medical conditions that are common after age 65. Certain conditions and lifestyle choices may make you more likely to have a fall. Your health care provider may recommend:

- Regular vision checks. Poor vision and conditions such as cataracts can make you more likely to have a fall. If you wear glasses, make sure to get your prescription updated if your vision changes.
- Medicine review. Work with your health care provider to regularly review all of the medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines. Ask your health care provider about any side effects that may make you more likely to have a fall. Tell your health care provider if any medicines that you take make you feel dizzy or sleepy.
- Osteoporosis screening. Osteoporosis is a condition that causes the bones to get weaker. This can make the bones weak and cause them to break more easily.
- Blood pressure screening. Blood pressure changes and medicines to control blood

pressure can make you feel dizzy.

- Strength and balance checks. Your health care provider may recommend certain tests to check your strength and balance while standing, walking, or changing positions.
- Foot health exam. Foot pain and numbness, as well as not wearing proper footwear, can make you more likely to have a fall.
- Depression screening. You may be more likely to have a fall if you have a fear of falling, feel emotionally low, or feel unable to do activities that you used to do.
- Alcohol use screening. Using too much alcohol can affect your balance and may make you more likely to have a fall.

What actions can I take to lower my risk of falls?

General instructions

- Talk with your health care provider about your risks for falling. Tell your health care provider if:
 - You fall. Be sure to tell your health care provider about all falls, even ones that seem minor.
 - You feel dizzy, sleepy, or off-balance.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider. These include any supplements.
- Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight. A healthy diet includes low-fat dairy products, low-fat (*lean*) meats, and fiber from whole grains, beans, and lots of fruits and vegetables.

Home safety

- Remove any tripping hazards, such as rugs, cords, and clutter.
- Install safety equipment such as grab bars in bathrooms and safety rails on stairs.

- Keep rooms and walkways well-lit.

Activity



- Follow a regular exercise program to stay fit. This will help you maintain your balance. Ask your health care provider what types of exercise are appropriate for you.
- If you need a cane or walker, use it as recommended by your health care provider.
- Wear supportive shoes that have nonskid soles.

Lifestyle

- **Do not** drink alcohol if your health care provider tells you not to drink.
- If you drink alcohol, limit how much you have:
 - 0–1 drink a day for women.
 - 0–2 drinks a day for men.
- Be aware of how much alcohol is in your drink. In the U.S., one drink equals one typical bottle of beer (12 oz), one-half glass of wine (5 oz), or one shot of hard liquor (1½ oz).
- **Do not** use any products that contain nicotine or tobacco, such as cigarettes and e-cigarettes. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider.

Summary

- Having a healthy lifestyle and getting preventive care can help to protect your health

and wellness after age 65.

- Screening and testing are the best way to find a health problem early and help you avoid having a fall. Early diagnosis and treatment give you the best chance for managing medical conditions that are more common for people who are older than age 65.
- Falls are a major cause of broken bones and head injuries in people who are older than age 65. Take precautions to prevent a fall at home.
- Work with your health care provider to learn what changes you can make to improve your health and wellness and to prevent falls.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.