



Safe and Steady™

A Fall Prevention Resource



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Safe and Steady Fall Prevention Resource®



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Hip Fractures

Hip fractures are the most common injury caused by falls

Every year, hip fractures result in over **300,000** hospitalizations

Only **25%** of people make a full recovery

40% never return home

20% of older adults die within a year of the fall

Falls are the Main Reason Why Many Older Adults Lose Their Independence

You probably know of someone who has suffered a serious injury as a result of a fall. Every year, 1 in 3 people fall and over 800,000 are hospitalized for serious injuries like hip fractures and head traumas.



People who fall once are more likely to fall again.

**Have you fallen in the past year?
Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking?
Do you worry about falling?**

If you answered yes to one of these questions, you may be at risk of falling!

Where do most falls occur?

Most falls happen inside or near the home.

55% inside the home¹



23% outside but near the home

22% away from home



Internal Risk Factors

- Weakness in the legs
- Loss of strength
- Reduced flexibility
- Loss of balance
- Shuffling
- Limited mobility
- Poor eyesight
- Change in hearing
- Confusion
- Chronic pain
- Depression
- Medication issues
- Decreased sensation in the feet
- A fall in the past year
- Dehydration

Do you ever worry about losing your independence?

Know Your Risk Factors

Falls do not just happen! Usually one or more underlying risk factors contribute to a fall. Risk factors are often linked to a physical condition, a medical problem or the environment.

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of falling and getting injured.



Muscle Weakness is the #1 Risk Factor!

Dehydration is an often overlooked risk factor associated with low blood pressure, confusion and loss of balance - all factors that can bring on a fall.

As we age, the body tends to lose water, causing dehydration. You can become dehydrated without realizing it in warm weather.

External Risk Factors

- Clutter and tripping hazards: throw rugs, electrical cords, magazines, pet bowls, pets, oxygen tubing
- Uneven floor surfaces: going from a carpeted room into a room with tiles or wood flooring
- Unclear transition from last step to landing
- Poor lighting: dark shadows in stairwells, hallways, or other areas
- Stairs without proper railing
- Slippery bathtub or shower and lack of grab bars
- Low toilet seat or difficulty getting on or off the toilet, lack of grab bars
- Poorly fitting footwear: too big or too small, backless, slippery soles
- Wet floors
- Moving too fast or turning too quickly
- Low furniture or chair without arms
- Holding onto furniture or walls for stability when walking
- Over-reaching for items
- Overuse of alcohol
- Risky behavior such as standing on a chair to reach an object



The Emotional and Social Impact of Falling



Emotional Impact

Fear of falling again is common after a fall.

People who have fallen often hold onto furniture or walls for balance, look down at the floor when walking instead of straight ahead, delay going to the bathroom, getting a drink of water or performing other activities to avoid the possibility of falling again.

Social Impact

After a fall, many people avoid going to activities outside the home to reduce their risk of falling. By avoiding social activities, aging adults will miss family functions, seeing grandchildren or connecting with friends.

Lack of socialization can cause loneliness, sadness and depression.



Diet and Physical Activity

Having healthy bones and strong muscles may help reduce the risk of a hip fracture or other injury if you fall. Diet and physical activity can help keep your bones and muscles strong.



Diet

Calcium and Vitamin D are especially important for maintaining good bone health. Calcium helps the body maintain bone strength and Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. The body absorbs calcium from food and from oral supplements.

Dietary Sources of Calcium Include:

- Dairy products: milk, yogurt and cheese
- Orange juice, cereals and other foods fortified with calcium
- Dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collard greens and bok choy
- Fish canned with their bones such as sardines and salmon, soybeans, tofu and nuts such as almonds

Calcium supplements may also be needed. Consult with your doctor.

Dietary Sources of Vitamin D Include:

- Fatty fish like sardines, salmon and tuna
- Certain mushrooms, egg yolks, beef liver
- Fortified dairy products, cereals and bread products

Vitamin D supplements may also be needed. Taking too much may be harmful. Consult with your doctor.



Physical Activity

Loss of strength during aging is partly caused by reduced physical activity. Older adults can benefit from regular exercise and other recreational activity.

Consult your doctor before starting a physical activity program.



Benefits of Physical Activity:

- Strengthens muscles, bones and joints
- Controls swelling and reduces pain associated with arthritis
- Improves balance and endurance
- Improves mood and reduces anxiety and depression
- Reduces the risk of falling, fractures and injuries
- Increases the ability to live independently

Physical Activity How to Get Started

Incorporate activities that improve strength, balance, flexibility and endurance.

Consult with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.

If you have been inactive for a long time – start slow. Begin with short intervals of moderate activity for 5-10 minutes and gradually increase time intervals and intensity.

Walking and gardening are the two most common physical activities that older adults enjoy. Tai Chi is another popular activity that is very effective for increasing balance. There are many other options available, including several for homebound and wheelchair bound adults that can be done at home. Find an activity you enjoy, make it fun and you will be more inclined to participate.

Social support from family and friends positively encourages regular physical activity.²



Here are six ways to make exercise a regular part of your daily life.

1. Make it a priority
2. Make it easy
3. Make it safe
4. Make it social
5. Make it interesting and fun
6. Make it an active decision³

Most Falls are Preventable

Steps You Can Take:

Visit your Doctor to Discuss

- Recent falls
- Blood pressure concerns
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded when getting up
- Benefits of supplements
- Bone health, benefits of a bone density test
- Medication
- Recommendations for physical activity
- Physical Therapy (PT) or Occupational Therapy (OT) to assess gait or balance issues

Have your Medicines Reviewed

- Ask your pharmacist or doctor to review all your prescribed and over-the-counter medications

Schedule an Eye Exam

- Have your vision checked at least annually
- Small vision changes can make you unstable

Wear Sensible Footwear

- Shoes should be comfortable and fit well

Modify Risky Behaviors

- Limit alcohol use because it can affect balance and lower your reflexes
- Don't stand on unstable objects to reach for items



Use the 5 Second Rule!

Most falls occur when doing everyday activities like standing up, reaching or turning around.

Sit on the edge of the bed and count to five before you stand, count to five again before you walk and again before you pivot or turn.





Areas to Make Easy Home Modifications

Remove Clutter

- Remove clutter or objects that block your pathways such as: magazines, towels, pet bowls, electrical cords, etc.
- Coil or tape electrical cords (like lamp cords, phone cords, etc.) to the wall or call an electrician if additional outlets are needed
- Remove throw rugs or secure them with double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so they stay in place

Improve Lighting

- Use the highest wattage bulbs recommended for a fixture
- Use nightlights in bathrooms, bedrooms and hallways
- Have a charged flashlight handy in case of a power outage
- Put a lamp on each side of the bed

Stairways

- Fix loose handrails on stairs or install new ones
- Make sure sturdy handrails are on both sides of the stairs
- Add a strip of reflective tape to the edge of each stair to improve visibility
- Put a light over the stairway

Bathrooms

- Install grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet
- Install a non-slip rubber mat or non-skid strips on the floor of the tub or shower
- Keep the floor dry at all times
- Place grooming items within easy reach
- Remove loose bathmats or rugs after use

Additional Recommendations

- Use assistive devices such as canes, walkers, etc. as instructed
- Place a phone for easy accessibility during an emergency
- Consider a personal medical alert system that provides a bracelet or necklace with an emergency button to be worn at all times in your home
- Keep emergency and frequently-used phone number handy
- Move items like food, dishes, and clothing to lower shelves or a location within easy reach
- Keep commonly-used items on a kitchen counter or a beside table

What Can I Do if I Fall?

If you are hurt or cannot get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you are alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive.

A sudden fall can be upsetting. If you do fall, try to stay as calm as possible.

1. Take several deep breaths to try to relax.
2. Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments to get over the initial shock.
3. Decide if you are hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.

How to get up from a fall:

1. If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side.
2. Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.
3. Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor.
4. From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.



Home Safety Checklist

Entrance	No	Yes
Are the railings secure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are locks working properly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are tripping hazards removed (water hose, electrical cords, shoes)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you view visitors prior to entry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are entryways well lit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you retrieve the mail and newspaper safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is someone available to sand or salt your walkway in icy weather?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kitchen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you turn the sink faucets on and off?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are appliances working properly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you open and close the refrigerator?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you operate the stove?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you safely pull down the oven door?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you open and close kitchen cabinets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you reach and obtain supplies such as groceries, dishes, cookware and pantry items?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have adequate countertop space?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access electrical outlets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you safely transport food to eating area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are flammable materials kept away from the stove?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a fire extinguisher handy? Do you know how to use it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use a step stool for accessing items in hard-to-reach areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are pet food bowls out of the way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you easily get in and out of bed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are throw rugs removed from near the bed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a clear path to the bathroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are light switches or lamps accessible from the bed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the phone within reach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you easily access clothes in closets or dresser drawers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are frequently-used items within reach on your bedside table?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Bathroom	No	Yes
Can you safely transfer in and out of the tub or shower?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a tub chair or bench available, if needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you using a mat or non-skid strips in the tub?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you installed grab bars?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you safely transfer on and off the toilet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a raised toilet seat or safety railings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access the sink effectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have space to set up your grooming supplies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a place to lay towels near the tub or shower?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access and reach electrical outlets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you easily access light switches?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use night lights?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Halls and Stairways	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have adequate lighting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the carpet secure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the non-carpeted steps have non-skid strips or slip-resistant runners?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are these areas free of clutter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are railings secured along the halls and stairs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Living Room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you get up and down from sofas and chairs safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access light switches and lamps and turn them on and off?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access television controls?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are electrical cords tucked safely away?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have throw rugs been removed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the smoke detector working?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is one installed on each floor and in each bedroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are carbon monoxide detectors working properly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are electrical cords intact and free of damage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are emergency phone numbers easy to access? (near phone, posted on kitchen fridge, bedside table)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have easy access to a phone in the event of a fall?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are medicines stored and clearly labeled?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you access laundry and carry the laundry basket or do you have someone who can assist with these tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The risk of falling increases with age. The good news is that most falls are preventable! This booklet contains many tools and resources to help you identify and reduce your risk factors.

Resources:

¹ 1997 and 1998 National Health Interview Survey <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/data-questions-documentation.htm>

²<https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderad.htm>

³<https://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/causesandriskfactors/01.html>

National Institute on Aging (2017)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017)



The National Institute of Aging at NIH Health has a free program called Go4Life that is designed to help older adults fit exercise and physical activity into their daily life. The program offers information about physical activities, nutrition and safety to help improve quality of life. The website will guide you through the steps to set fitness goals, track your progress, get coaching tips and celebrate your success. Best of all, it's free!

<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/exercises>

Centers for Disease Control

CDC's STEADI (Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, & Injuries) Tool Kit available on their website <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/patient.html>



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