

DisabilityCampaign.org

Elderly Care: How to prevent falls

Each year, millions of older people fall. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that more than 1 out of 4 older people falls each year — but only less than half tell their doctor. Falls



can result in serious consequences, including hip fractures, broken bones, and/or head injuries that could be fatal. In a 2013 study, falling was found to be the leading cause of injury and death by injury in adults over the age of 65. Falls can lead to loss of independence and it can result in permanent disability. What's more, falling once doubles your chances of falling again. The good thing is, many falls can be prevented. It's why if you have an aging parent at home or if you are the one at risk, it's important you take steps in reducing the fall risk associated with older age.

Risk Factors

The likelihood of someone falling increases with age. Other risk factors include:

- Low levels of vitamin D
- Vision problems
- Balance and walking problems
- Use of medications, including tranquilizers, sedatives, antidepressants, and painkillers
- Foot problems
- Chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, stroke, or arthritis that result in lost function or require the use of multiple medications
- Having fallen in the past
- Hazards at home

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

1. **Talk to your doctor.** Ask your healthcare provider to evaluate your risk for falling. If there's something that you're specifically concerned with, such as foot problems or dizziness, make sure you bring it up during your appointment. Ask if they can check your vitamin D and calcium levels, as these are critical to keeping your bones strong. If you go to physical therapy, talk to your PT about checking to make sure you're using your walker properly or have them show you ways in which you can get up in case you fall.
2. **Eat healthy and stay hydrated.** Eating better will likely help you feel better. Besides, incorporating more fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and healthy grains in your diet can help with health conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes — diseases that have been known to cause people to fall. Dehydration is common among the elderly, so make sure to drink plenty of water, especially if it's hot outside.
3. **Know your medications.** Make sure to have your pharmacist review your medications, including over-the-counter medicines, as these can cause drowsiness and balance problems. Be aware of any side effects, so that you know when to contact your doctor. Perhaps a different medicine or dosage could provide similar relief, while minimizing the side effects that cause you to feel lightheaded, dizzy, or unstable.
4. **Exercise.** Not only will exercise help you lose any excess weight that may be affecting your knees or back, but it will also help you build stronger bones and muscles. Talk to your medical care provider about what exercise options are a good fit for you. These may include yoga, water exercising, stretching, walks, tai chi, and strength training.



5. **Have your vision checked.** You should make an appointment to have your vision checked every year. If objects look blurry or you cannot recognize signs, you're more likely to trip and fall. Also, if you notice any changes in your vision, contact your optometrist or ophthalmologist so he or she can figure out what's going on.

6. **Wear proper shoes.** Remember back when you were a kid and your mom would say, "Tie your shoes; you're going to fall,"? Well, the rules don't change as we get older: it's still important to pay attention to the shoes you wear. Loose-fitting shoes could make you slip and fall, whereas tight-fitting shoes could cause painful calluses or corns. Consider switching out high-heels for low-heeled shoes and stay away from slippers that don't provide heel support.



7. **Be safe while showering.** It's easier to fall on slippery or wet surfaces. Simple and low-cost safety measures include installing grab handles and nonskid mats in the tub and shower, or using a shower chair or bath bench. WebMD recommends getting into a tub or shower by putting the weaker leg in first; when you get out of a tub or shower, you should use your strong leg first. If you can afford it, renovate your bathroom and switch out the tub for a walk-in shower.

8. **Make your home safer.** If there are little ones at home, make sure toys are picked up and out of the way. Keep your pets in one place at night and train them not to jump or get underfoot. Also, keep your house well-lit and install night lights in your hallways and bathrooms. Stairways are a big hazard, so make sure your handrails are sturdy. Don't keep things stored too high up and get rid of clutter. Always keep a phone and a flashlight by your bed (and make sure the batteries are still working).

9. **When outdoors, be careful.**



Make sure your hands are free and that walkways are safe. Carry your cell phone with you in a pocket or belt-clip. Check the weather, as rain, snow, and ice can make the ground slippery. If you get snow and ice in the winter, have a friend or family member sprinkle salt or sand to help it melt. Consider installing a ramp with railings and using it in place of any stairs that lead to your home.

10. **If you live alone, take extra care.** Depending on your fall risk, you may want to consider wearing an alert device that can bring help in case you fall and cannot get up. Or, carry your phone with you in a belt-clip or fanny pack, especially if you're heading to the basement or if you live in a large home. Set up a plan with a family member or friend to call them once a day so that if something were to happen, they would be more alert.

For a thorough checklist you can use to prevent falls and ensure your home is safe, [download this PDF brochure](#) (in [English](#) or [Spanish](#)) published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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