

Tips to Help Protect Yourself or a Loved One from a Fall

No one thinks they will fall and get injured. But safety studies say otherwise. In fact, falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries in older Americans. One out of four older adults will fall each year in the U.S. and one out of every five falls will result in an injury, such as a broken bone, or head injury.¹

Falls threaten a person's safety and independence. However, falls are not inevitable; there are steps that can be taken to minimize the risk of a loved one falling. Balance and strength exercises, medication management, regular check-ups and an objective assessment of one's living environment can all make a difference in helping ensure she or he stays on their feet.

4 Practical Tips to Help Prevent Falls

Tip #1: Talk with a trusted medical professional/pharmacist

- Ask your primary physician or other health care provider to evaluate the fall risk of your or someone you are concerned about, as well as recommend specific steps that can be taken to reduce the risk.
- Review the medications being taken with that same healthcare provider or a pharmacist to determine whether any may contribute to sleepiness or dizziness. Keep in mind medications can have different side effects as people age.
- Ask about the value of supplements that might improve bone, nerve or muscle health.

¹*Keep on Your Feet – Preventing Older Adult Falls, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*



Tip #2: Exercise to improve balance and muscle strength

- Regular exercise can strengthen muscles and improve balance, reducing the risk of falling.
- At least 150 minutes per week of physical activity can help keep bones strong.²
- Exercises targeted at improving balance and leg strength can lead to more stability and increased confidence.
- Talk to a healthcare professional for recommendations on exercises to improve strength and balance.
- Avoid or limit alcohol.
- Get enough sleep.
- Encourage the use of a cane or walker to provide more stability, particularly when walking outside.

Tip #3: Have eyes, ears and feet checked

- Have vision checked by an eye doctor at least once a year, and update prescriptions as directed.
- Even small changes in hearing can be linked to an increase in the likelihood of a fall.
- If you or your loved one wears glasses with progressive lenses or bifocals, investigate the benefit of getting a pair that corrects for distance only, particularly for outdoor activities.

²*Falls and Fractures in Older Adults: Causes and Prevention. The National Institute on Aging.*
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- Be aware that cataracts or glaucoma can impair vision.
- Get feet checked annually by a podiatrist and discuss whether you or your loved one are wearing the best and most appropriate footwear.



Tip #4: Assess the safety of the home

- Do a walk-through safety assessment.
- Assess the lighting in the home, especially at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Ensure there is adequate lighting if someone needs to get up in the middle of the night.
- Consider installing lightweight curtains in windows to reduce glare.
- Make sure there are two secure rails on either side of all staircases.
- Install grab bars next to and inside the tub/shower and next to the toilet.
- Remove items sitting on stairs and in high traffic areas.
- Make sure items frequently used and kept in cabinets are on lower shelves, and generally easy to reach (without the aid of a step stool).
- Use non-slip mats on bathtub and shower floors.
- Remove throw rugs that could be slipping or create a trip hazard.
- Repair any broken or uneven steps.

For professional help assessing the home, consult with an Occupational Therapist. Most falls are caused by a combination of risk factors. The more you can address, the greater the odds you will avoid an accidental fall.