



Patient Information

Preventing Falls: Modifications Can Help

For people older than 65 the annual odds of experiencing a fall are one in three. Don't let these statistics get you down. Many falls are preventable, as are the resulting injuries. This handout provides helpful hints to avoid falls.

Risk Factors

As you get older, skeletal, muscular and proprioception changes can make you more prone to fall. For example, you may not hear or see as well as you used to, which can affect your balance and coordination.

Your bones may be more fragile because of conditions such as arthritis or osteoporosis, which increase the risk of injury if you fall. These conditions could also be the reason for a fall. Slowed reaction time is another problem that occurs with aging.

Review your medications with your nurse practitioner to identify any interactions or side effects that may increase your risk of falling. Your NP may also recommend a cane or a walker.

Physical activity helps reduce falls because it improves strength, balance, agility, coordination and flexibility. You might want to walk or do water workouts. Check with your NP to see which exercise regimen is right for you.

Statistics show that 60% of falls by elderly people occur at home. Simple changes to the way your house is set up can help prevent falls. Some of these changes are outlined below.

Kitchen

- Store food, dishes and other frequently used items on lower shelves that are within easy reach.
- Don't stand on a chair to reach something in an upper cabinet; instead, use a "reach stick," which is a grabbing tool you can buy at most hardware or medical supply stores.
- Immediately clean up any spills on the floor.

Bedroom

- Make sure you can get in and out of your bed easily. Adjust the height of the bed if necessary.
- Use flannel or cotton sheets, which are not slippery like satin.

Bathroom

- Have grab bars installed on bathroom walls and in the shower.

- Place a rubber mat or self-stick, nonskid strips in the tub.
- Use a shower chair in the bathtub if you are unsteady or cannot lower yourself into the tub.
- Use a raised toilet seat or a model with armrests to stabilize yourself.
- Allow soap suds to drain before moving around in the shower.
- If you have an enclosed glass shower, have the glass replaced with a non-shattering material.

Steps

- If you have wood or tile steps, place a non-slip tread on each one.
- Have handrails installed on the entire length of both sides of the staircase.
- Make sure the staircase is well lit, with light switches at the top and bottom.
- Have loose carpeting or wooden boards repaired.
- Have the front edge of steps painted a contrasting color so you can see them. For example, if your steps are dark wood, the edges should be painted a light color.

Everywhere

- Remove area rugs or secure them to the floor with double-sided tape or non-stick backing.
- Keep cords and wires out of walkways where you could trip on them.
- Keep any area where you walk clear of clutter.
- Keep your home brightly lit at all times; use night lights to help you see when it's dark.

A Few Final Tips

- Don't get out of bed or a chair too quickly. This causes a drop in blood pressure, which makes you feel faint.
- Be careful not to trip over your pets.
- Wear properly fitting clothes so you don't trip.
- Wear sturdy shoes with nonskid soles.
- Make sure the laces stay tied at all times.
- Consider using an alarm device from an emergency-monitoring company, especially if you live alone

Additional Notes:
