

How to reduce your risk of falls

Injuries from a fall can range from bruises and cuts to more serious problems, like a broken hip. Fortunately, most falls can be prevented. If you've fallen recently or think you might have a balance problem, tell your doctor immediately.

Am I in danger of falling?

People fall more as they get older because of changes that come with age, such as poor vision, balance problems, weak muscles, and arthritis. Cluttered, poorly lit living quarters also increase the risk. You are more likely to fall if you:

- have fallen before
- don't get much exercise and have weakness in your legs
- are unsteady when you walk
- are taking medicines that can contribute to falls, such as sedatives or antidepressants, or take 4 or more different medications
- have medical problems such as Parkinson's disease, osteoporosis, heart disease, or low blood pressure—or if you have had a stroke.

How can I protect myself at home?

You can minimize the risk of falling at home by taking these steps:

- Keep the floors free of clutter. Remove things you can easily trip over, such as throw rugs, electrical cords, piles of paper, and clothing.
- Make sure you have good lighting throughout the house, and put night lights in your bedroom, bathroom, hallways, and stairs.
- Have railings installed in the bathtub and shower and around the toilet, and use nonskid mats in the tub and shower area.
- Keep items within easy reach in the kitchen.
- Put handrails on the stairs. (Using bright paint or strips of tape on the railing will make it easier to see.)
- Wear shoes with firm, nonskid soles. Don't wear house shoes, such as flip-flops or loose slippers, or shoes with heels higher than 1 inch.

What else can I do to protect myself?

- Get your eyes checked regularly. Wear your glasses as prescribed, and clean them often to improve visibility.
- Stay active and exercise often to keep your muscles and bones strong. Ask your doctor about weight-bearing exercise, and what you can do to improve your balance.
- Eat a healthy diet, with plenty of calcium and vitamin D. Limit consumption of alcoholic beverages (have no more than 2 drinks a day).
- Take care of your feet. If they hurt, tell your doctor.
- Ask the doctor whether you need a cane or other walking aid.
- Have your doctor go over all your medicines to see if you're taking anything that can make you dizzy or sleepy.
- Get up very slowly. When you're getting out of bed, sit on the side for a few minutes before you stand up. Getting up too quickly can make you feel dizzy or lose your balance.
- If you live alone, get an emergency alert system that you can wear around your wrist or neck and press to call for help if you fall and can't reach the phone.

Where can I get more information?

American Geriatrics Society

212-308-1414

<http://www.americangeriatrics.org>

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

770-488-1506

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/falls/#PDF>

National Institute on Aging

<http://www.niapublications.org/engagepages/falls.asp>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

<http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSC/PUBS/701.html>