

Risk factors for falls

The chance of falling grows as we age. Some common risk factors include:

- ✓ 70 years old or older
- ✓ A previous fall
- ✓ Female gender
- ✓ Walking or balance problems
- ✓ Medication side effects or interactions
- ✓ Taking multiple medications
- ✓ Vision problems
- ✓ Chronic conditions such as stroke or arthritis
- ✓ Alcohol and drug use
- ✓ Lack of physical activity, being "out of shape"
- ✓ Steps, slopes, and slippery floors
- ✓ Poor lighting
- ✓ Loose footwear or rugs

Several of these factors may combine to cause a fall, but you can do many things to reduce this hazard.

Are you at risk?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- ✓ **Have I had a fall in the last year?**
- ✓ **Do I have balance problems or trouble getting around?**
- ✓ **Am I afraid of falling?**

If you answer "yes" to any of these, talk to your doctor about ways to reduce your risk. Many falls can be prevented by making simple changes.

More information

Many national and local organizations provide information and help. Visit these websites and search for "falls" for more information.

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
www.aarp.org

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/preventingfalls/

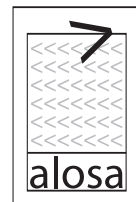
National Institute on Aging (NIA)
www.nia.nih.gov/

National Resource Center for Safe Aging
<http://www.safeaging.org/about.asp>



Preventing Falls and Mobility Problems

About a third of older adults fall in the United States each year. One in ten of these falls results in a serious injury, such as a hip fracture, and may lead to a stay in the hospital or nursing home. But falls and mobility problems are not simply a normal part of getting older. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to lower your risk.



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Balanced data about medications

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This material is provided by the nonprofit Alosa Foundation, which is not affiliated in any way with any pharmaceutical company. These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating physician based on assessment of the individual patient.

visit our website: www.RxFacts.org



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Balanced data about medications



Your doctor can help

Medicines may affect your body in different ways when you get older. Some products, or combinations of products, can increase the risk of falling.

Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about **all** the medicines you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter products, vitamins, herbs, and other supplements.

Tell your doctor if you feel weak, confused, or tired, or if your vision is poor. Also talk with your doctor about alcohol or drug use.

Your doctor may measure your blood pressure, order lab tests, and check your strength, balance, coordination, and vision.

Have your eyes checked

Have your sight checked at least once a year.

Be physically active

Regular activity can help lower your risk of falling by improving strength, coordination, and balance. Exercise can also help reduce anxiety and stress, and improve overall health.

First, ask your doctor if you should have any limits on physical activity. When you have the okay, begin slowly, and try more challenging activities when you can. Be active most days of the week, for at least 30-60 minutes.

Plan an exercise schedule, and choose a time of day that works best for you. Stick with your exercise program to see benefits over time. Set goals for yourself so you can measure your progress and celebrate your success.

Choose activities you like, such as walking, dancing, or riding a bike. Stay motivated by exercising with friends or family, doing a variety of activities, joining a gym or class, and signing up for special events that involve exercise.

YOUR GOAL: Be physically active...

- at least 30-60 minutes a day
- most, if not all days of the week

✓ **Strength training** (also called resistance training) is exercise that improves the power of your muscles, ligaments, tendons, and bones.

Gym equipment can be used, but hand weights or body weight can also be used for resistance. Use a weight that will cause your muscles to feel tired after you repeat a resistance motion 8-12 times.

Exercise that strengthens your lower body is best for preventing falls. Strength training should be done 2-3 times per week, but not every day, to allow time for your muscles to recover.

A guide to strength training is available from the Centers for Disease Control at: www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/growingstronger/index.html

✓ **Tai Chi** is another exercise that can help prevent falls. It is a low-impact exercise that focuses on balance and coordination. Tai Chi classes in your area can be found at: www.taichinetwork.org/list_result.cfm

Improve home safety

Make your home safe by finding and fixing hazards. Professional home safety assessments may be covered by Medicare. Some things you should be aware of:

- ✓ **Lighting:** Make sure you have enough light in your home. Hang shades or sheer curtains to reduce glare from windows. Make sure all lights work. Use nightlights and easy-to-reach lamps.
- ✓ **Stairs:** Use handrails when climbing stairs. Make sure steps are even, safe, and well-lit. Remove loose objects from steps. Have light switches installed at the top and bottom of stairs. Paint the edge of each step a bright color so you can see them.
- ✓ **Floors:** Remove clutter such as shoes, laundry, and papers. Keep wires and cords away from your walking path. Arrange furniture so you have a clear path through each room. Remove throw rugs or secure them to the floor. Make sure carpet is firmly attached.
- ✓ **Bathrooms:** Have safety bars installed in your bathtub and at the toilet. Use mats in the bathtub and shower to prevent slips.
- ✓ **Throughout the house:** Keep regularly used items on low shelves so you can reach them. If you use a stepstool, hold on to a counter or other support. Wear shoes instead of slippers or going barefoot. Stand up slowly after sitting or lying down.

