

Preventing Falls at Home

Simple Steps to Keep You Safe

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, please let us know. We provide many free services including sign language interpreters, oral interpreters, TTYs, telephone amplifiers, note takers and written materials.

Stairs and living areas

- Keep your path clear. Remove clutter from stairs, hallways and other pathways. Arrange furniture to allow a clear path.
- Be aware of nearby pets.
- Use cordless phones. Keep electrical cords off the floor and out of your path. Install new outlets, if needed.
- Remove throw-rugs or replace them with rubber-backed rugs. Tape the edges of large area rugs (use double-sided tape).
- Install handrails on stairs. Make sure they're sturdy and well-mounted. Take your time when walking up or down the stairs.
- If you have only one rail, go down the stairs sideways. Hold the rail with both hands.
- Use carpet or non-skid treads on all stairways. Mark the top and bottom stairs with bright-colored tape.
- Turn on bright lights as you move through the house or use the stairs. Keep a small flashlight on your key chain.
- Carry a cordless phone around the house, or use a medical alert service such as Lifeline. This is even more vital if you live alone.
- Keep emergency numbers near every phone.

Bedroom

- Place your eyeglasses, phone and light within reach of your bed.
- Keep a night-light in your room. Turn on lights when you get up at night. As you get older, you will need brighter lights to see well.
- If you get up often to use the toilet, think about putting a commode or urinal next to the bed.

Bathroom

- Use night-lights to light the way to the bathroom.
- Install grab bars by the toilet, bathtub or shower. Never use the towel rack to steady yourself. Do not steady yourself on the sink.
- Install a raised toilet seat or safety frame. This makes it easier to get on and off the toilet.
- If you have trouble standing in the shower, use a shower seat and a hand-held shower head.

- Use a non-slip bath mat or non-skid strips in the tub or shower. Use a non-slip rug outside of the tub or shower.
- Clean up spilled water right away.

Kitchen

- Re-arrange cupboards and drawers. Place the items you use most within easy reach (between shoulders and knees).
- Clean up spills right away to reduce the chance of slipping.
- Don't stand on chairs to reach high items. Don't store heavy items on high shelves. If you must climb up high, use a secure step stool with handrail.
- Use a long-handled reacher.
- Think about getting a cart to help move heavy or hot items.

Sitting, standing and walking

- When getting out of bed, sit on the edge for a while before standing up.
- If you feel dizzy or light-headed, stand up slowly.
- When sitting down, reach back with your hands to find the chair or bed behind you.
- Sit in a high chair with armrests. Use the armrests to get up and sit down. Avoid chairs with wheels.
- Think about using a cane or walker when standing or walking. (Never use a walker to pull yourself up.) Follow the directions of your doctor or rehab therapist.
- When indoors or outdoors: Wear well-fitted, non-slip shoes with low heels and good support. Or use slippers with rubber soles. Don't walk in your socks.
 - When shopping for shoes, try them on late in the day, when your feet are slightly larger. This will ensure the shoes are not too tight.
 - Don't use slip-on shoes.
 - Keep your laces tied. If you have trouble tying laces, try shoes with elastic shoelaces or Velcro fasteners.
- To keep from tripping, shorten shoelaces and any cords on clothes.
- Take your time answering the phone or door. Rushing may cause you to trip and fall.

Outdoors

- Take care when walking on slippery, wet surfaces. Keep your hands free in case you fall and need to catch yourself.
- Use non-skid treads on stairways. Or paint stairs with a product that contains grit or sand. Repair damaged stairs.
- If you have trouble seeing, mark the edges of the steps with colored paint that is easy to see.
- Keep steps and sidewalks free of clutter and debris.
- Install sensor lights that turn on and off as needed.
- When walking, watch for:
 - Curbs, ramps and changes in elevation
 - Cracks in steps and sidewalks
 - Pets or leashes in your path
 - Tree roots and low-hanging tree branches.
- In the winter, wear boots with non-skid soles. Or buy ice grips from the sporting goods store.
- Shovel right after a snowfall. (Better yet, hire someone else to shovel.) Use salt or sand on icy walkways.
- Don't rush. Take your time when crossing the street and getting in or out of cars.
- Unload your car in several small trips, or use a cart. If you carry too much, it may block your vision or cause you to lose balance.
- Limit the size and weight of shoulder bags and purses.

Taking care of your health

- Have your doctor or pharmacist review all the medicines you take. (This includes over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and herbal products.) Some medicines have side effects that could lead to a fall. Carry a list of current medicines at all times. Call your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about your medicines.
- Limit alcohol.
- Get your blood pressure, hearing and vision checked every year.
- If you wear glasses, make sure they are up to date. Keep them clean. If they have scratches, bring them to a store that sells glasses. The staff can remove the scratches.
 - Take off your reading glasses when you are walking.
 - Wear sunglasses and a hat to reduce glare. Remove them when indoors.
 - When moving between the indoors and outdoors, give your eyes time to adjust to the new lighting.

- Ask your doctor or therapist about safe exercises to build strength and improve balance.
 - Try to exercise a total of 30 minutes per day. You may do this in two or three short sessions (10 to 15 minutes each).
 - Walk every day, even if only around the house. Start slowly and walk whenever you can. Find a partner—you may go farther when you walk with a friend. Many people walk in indoor shopping malls.
 - Keep moving at home. Gently stretch your arms, legs and joints to keep them moving freely.
- Take care of your feet. If your feet hurt, you will be less active. This could increase your risk of a fall.
 - Keep feet clean and dry. Wash them daily with warm water. Rinse off all soap and dry well, especially between the toes.
 - Trim toenails regularly. Cut nails straight across. If you have trouble bending over, ask someone for help.
 - Check your feet every day. Do not treat problems yourself. See your doctor if you notice:
 - Bunions, corns, calluses, warts
 - A sore that does not heal
 - Nail problems
 - New coldness, numbness or discomfort in your feet.

Remember, your risk for falling is higher if you:

- Have a history of falls
- Are over age 80
- Take four or more medicines
- Have problems with vision, hearing, walking or balance
- Have lost muscle strength and flexibility
- Have had trouble with daily activities because you're afraid of falling
- Are depressed or ill
- Have dementia or cognitive deficits (problems thinking)
- Have bladder problems.

Falling is not a normal part of aging. **If you fall, see your doctor right away.** Even if you are not hurt, you should find out why you fell and how to keep it from happening again.

Your doctor may refer you to a physical therapist to assess your balance.