

Keep moving to keep from falling

As part of your fall-prevention program consider activities such as walking, aerobics, water calisthenics or Tai Chi. Despite the age-related changes that you may observe, these exercises have proven to improve strength, balance, coordination and flexibility. Be sure to consult your doctor before starting any exercise program.

A physical or occupational therapist can be an essential partner to address some of the problems that affect movement and function and are an excellent resource as providers of fitness, wellness, and risk-reduction strategies. They can recommend carefully monitored exercise programs especially if you are new to exercise or have had a recent fall.

Sources:

American Geriatric Society, Guideline for the Prevention of Falls in Older Persons." - Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, "Falls Among Older Adults: An Overview" - Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, "Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults" - Health and Disability Research Institute, "Fear of Falling: It's a Matter of Balance." - Mayo Clinic, "Fall Prevention: 6 Ways to Reduce Your Falling Risk." - Miryoung Lee, MPH, Department of Epidemiology, University of Pittsburgh - UCSF Division of Geriatrics Primary Care Lecture Series "Falls in the Elderly."



Facility Name
Address
Phone Number



Falls

Falls are a leading cause of injury and death in adults over the age of 65. One of every three persons in this age group fall each year in the United States and, alarmingly, half of them are repeat fallers.

The physical consequences can be anything from minor to severe such as bruises, fractures, head trauma and even life-threatening injuries. Those who suffer from falls, even if not injured, can easily lose confidence in their own abilities leading to increased frailty, isolation and lower quality of life.



Who are at Risk?

According to the American Geriatric Society, the most common risk factors for falls identified in 16 different studies are the following:

- Muscle weakness
- History of falls
- Changes or problems with gait
- Balance problems
- Improper use of assisting device
- Visual deficits
- Arthritis
- Impaired Activities of Daily Living
- Depression
- Impaired cognition
- Age of greater than 80 years

Other factors cited are acute illness, history of medical conditions (such as stroke, Parkinson's disease), hearing deficits, taking multiple medications and environmental hazards.

Even though the risk for falls increases with advancing age, it does not have to be a natural consequence of aging. Lifestyle changes and some simple home modifications can prevent falls.

How to Prevent Falls

These are suggested guidelines by CDC to fall-proof your lifestyle:

- Begin a regular exercise program that increases strength and improves balance.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your prescription and over-the-counter medicines, to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Have your eyes checked at least once a year.
- Improve the safety of your home.

Some simple modifications you can do at home:

- Move furniture so your path is clear.
- Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
- Keep a clutter-free floor.
- Keep appliance cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them.
- Fix loose or uneven steps in stairs.
- Have adequate lighting at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- If possible, have handrails on both sides of the stairs and as long as the stairs.
- Paint a contrasting color on the top edge of all steps so you can see the stairs better.
- Keep things you use often on the lower shelves of the cabinets about waist level.
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.
- Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
- Place grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.
- Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.
- Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.
- If your bathroom is far away from your bed, consider the use of a bedside commode/urinal for evening use.

In addition, remember...

- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall and can't get up.

Most importantly, always remember to practice good judgment. Making these simple changes will help to give you the peace of mind and reduce your fall risk.