

Older adult fall prevention

As our population ages, the prevalence of falls among older adults is increasing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one in four older adults report a fall each year. In 2020, 36,508 older adults aged 65 and older died from preventable falls, and over 2.8 million were treated in emergency departments. Over the past 10 years, the number of older adult fall deaths has increased 59%, while emergency department visits have increased 19%.

The following checklist serves as a good reminder for us all, but especially for the older adults in our lives. Many falls can be prevented by making simple personal and lifestyle changes. Your doctor can also assess your risk of falling and suggest ways to prevent falls.

Remove common fall hazards:

- ✓ Keep floors clean and clear of clutter
- ✓ Maintain good lighting both indoors and on outdoor walkways
- ✓ Secure electrical cords out of traffic areas
- ✓ Use non-skid throw rugs in potentially slippery places, like bathrooms and front doors
- ✓ Install handrails on stairways, including porches
- ✓ Use a sturdy step stool when climbing or reaching for high places
- ✓ Clean up all spills immediately
- ✓ Wear sensible footwear
- ✓ Never stand on a chair, table or surface on wheels
- ✓ Arrange furniture to provide open pathways to walk through
- ✓ Periodically, check the condition of outdoor walkways and steps and repair as necessary
- ✓ Remove fallen leaves or snow from outdoor walkways
- ✓ Be aware that alcohol or other drugs, including prescription and over-the-counter medicine, can affect your balance and increase risk of falling



- ✓ Use non-skid mats or appliques in the bath and shower
- ✓ Install grab bars in the tub, shower and near the toilet, and install railings on stairs
- ✓ Provide adequate lighting in every room and stairway
- ✓ Place nightlights in the kitchen, bathroom and hallways
- ✓ Keep often-used items like clothing and food easily accessible to avoid using stools or ladders
- ✓ Avoid using electronic devices while walking as they are a distraction

Exercise Regularly

- ✓ Mild weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, climbing stairs and water workouts, may help slow bone loss from osteoporosis – having strong bones, especially in your lower body, can prevent fractures if you fall
- ✓ Practicing yoga or tai chi can help prevent falls by improving your balance and control
- ✓ Group and community exercise programs can help increase your flexibility, strength, balance and coordination – these kinds of exercises can also be done at home

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Stay Healthy

- ✓ Have your vision tested at least once a year, or if you think it has changed
- ✓ Get an annual physical examination and have your blood pressure checked both lying down and standing up
- ✓ Walkers, canes and all medical equipment should be properly sized and fitted by a qualified medical professional
- ✓ Maintain a healthy diet with adequate amounts of vitamin D and calcium

Wear Proper Shoes and Clothing

- ✓ Wear properly-fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles
- ✓ Replace slippers that are stretched out or too loose
- ✓ Use a long-handled shoehorn if you have trouble putting on your shoes
- ✓ Make sure clothing is properly fitted to prevent it from catching on something

Review Medications

- ✓ Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medications, both prescription and over-the-counter medicines, as well as any vitamins, minerals and herbal products you are taking – some medications do not work well together and may affect your coordination and balance
- ✓ Make sure all medications are clearly labeled and stored in a well-lit area according to instructions
- ✓ Have an up-to-date medication list and bring it with you to all doctor visits
- ✓ Take medications on schedule with a full glass of water, and avoid drinking alcohol in excess

