

Tips to Reduce Your Risk of Falling

Why falling can be a serious health risk

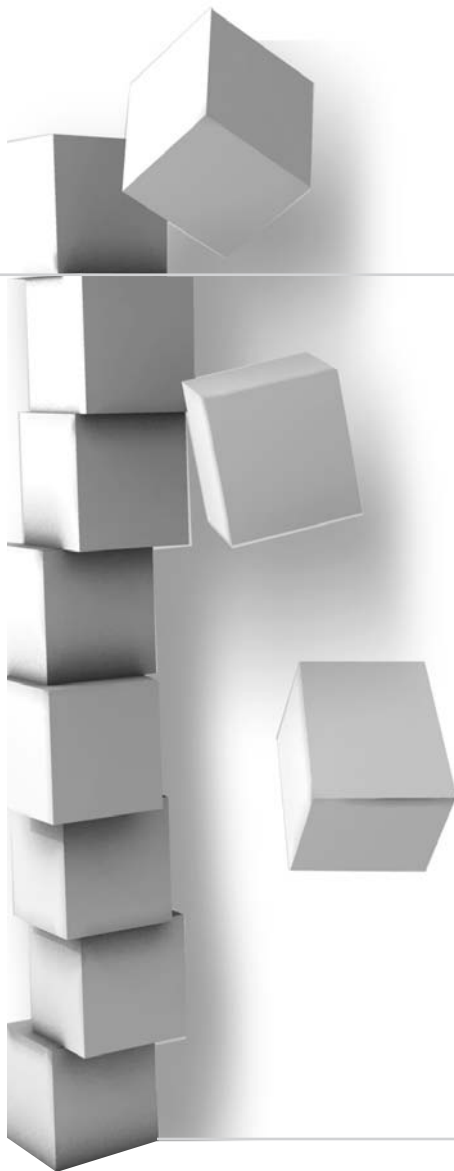
One third of people 65 years and older will fall each year and half of those people will fall more than once

Half of people 80 years and older will fall each year

Falls are the leading cause of death from injury in older adults

Falls often lead to disability through fractures, activity restriction and fear

Nearly half of people hospitalized for a hip fracture never return home to live independently



Who is at risk

These are common risk factors associated with falls. The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of falling:

- Fallen in the past
- Decreased strength
- Decreased feeling in your feet
- Changes in "gait" or walking pattern
- Recent hospitalization
- Acute or chronic illness
- Neurologic conditions or illness
- Difficulty with balance
- Use of four or more medications
- Changes in vision
- Dizziness
- Mental changes
- Fear of falling

What can be done to reduce your risk of falling?

First, it is important to remember that you CAN reduce your risk of falling. Falling is not a normal part of aging.

Studies have found that the best way to reduce your risk of falling is to address each risk factor. A balance specialist can perform an assessment to determine your risk and develop an individualized program. Your risk for falling can be reduced by at least 30% by using this approach.



1. Exercising Every Day

- a. You can increase your strength and balance at ANY age.
- b. You should consult a physical therapist for a full balance assessment to find the best exercises for you. You will need to do strengthening and balance exercises to improve balance.
- c. Studies have found that doing strengthening and balance exercises alone can reduce your risk of falling.
- d. For those with relatively mild balance problems, T'ai Chi or other community-based programs that include balance and strength training have been found to be effective in reducing falls.



2. Taking Care of Your Health and Medications

- a. Make sure you have regular medical visits and tell your primary care provider if you have any change in your health, including symptoms of dizziness, falls, or a change in your activity level.
- b. Discuss your medications with your pharmacist or your primary care provider. Make sure you are taking them correctly and let them know if you cannot afford your medications. If you have symptoms of dizziness, especially with a new medication, make sure your health care provider is aware.
- c. Have your vision checked every year.



3. Making Your Home Safe

- a. Your surroundings can put you at risk for falling:
 - In the winter, use a hiking stick or ski pole with a pointed end or ice grips for a cane. Also use gripping devices that can be wrapped around the bottom of your shoes.
 - In your home, remove clutter, install grab bars, and install hand rails on the stairs.

Safety Checklist



Floors

- Decrease and remove clutter
 - Remove all loose wires, cords, and throw rugs
 - Make sure rugs are anchored with double-sided tape and smooth on the floor
 - Keep furniture in its usual place
 - Do not wax floors or use non-slip wax
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Bathrooms

- Install non-skid tape in the tub and shower
 - Install grab bars in the shower and tub and near the toilet
 - Use a raised toilet seat
 - Do not use bath oil or creams in the tub or shower
 - Use a shower or tub chair if you are unsteady
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Lighting

- Make sure halls, stairways, and entrances are well lit and have switches at both ends
 - Install a night light in your bathroom, hall, and bedroom
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Kitchen

- Install non-skid rubber mats near sink and stove
 - Keep drawers and cupboards closed to avoid bumping into them
 - Place items within easy reach
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Stairs

- Make sure treads, rails, and rugs are secure
 - Install handrails on both sides of the stairs
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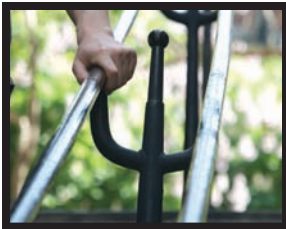
Bedroom

- Keep a flashlight and telephone in easy reach of the bed
- Place something sturdy next to the bed to help you get in and out
- If you have trouble walking to the bathroom at night, use a commode by your bedside so you will not have to walk to the bathroom



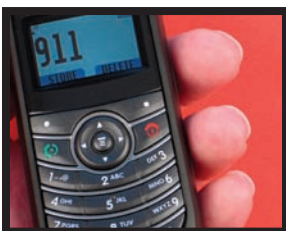
Everyday

- Keep items you use most often where you can reach them easily
- Wear sturdy, rubber-soled shoes; tie shoelaces securely
- Do NOT walk in socks, stockings, or slippers
- Make sure hems and cuffs are not too long so you will not trip over them
- Clean up spills right away
- Turn lights on if you get up in the middle of the night
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink because it might make you unsteady



Outside the Home

- Keep walkways free of ice and wet leaves
- Have cracks in pavement and holes in lawn fixed
- Beware of cracks in sidewalks, tree roots, holes, and changes in elevation
- Walk in good lighting conditions
- Wear footwear with firm soles and low heels
- Use caution when carrying something or hurrying
- Hold handrails and move slowly when climbing stairs outside
- Be careful in parking lots and garages; notice curbs and changes in elevation
- Be careful when using public transportation, especially getting on and off buses and trains; always use hand rails if they are available.
- Be careful when crossing streets at crosswalks. Cross where there are curb cuts or ramps to avoid tripping. Stop at center islands, when available, and wait for the next walk sign. Ask for help if you need it.
- Be sure to wear correct eyewear while walking. Bifocals and reading glasses can make it difficult to see hazards.



What to do if You Fall

- Have emergency numbers by every telephone
- Have a plan for getting help in an emergency
- Call Lifeline if you have this emergency system in place, or a similar 24 hour a day, 7 day a week medical help service

For more information, call our Rehabilitation Medicine Department (603) 650-5978