

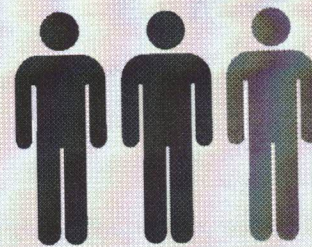


Tips for Preventing Serious Falls

Falls are a leading cause of serious injuries in older adults that can lead to hospitalization, nursing home admission, and even death among older people.

The chance of falling increases as we get older. Health problems such as arthritis, heart disease, muscle weakness, poor balance or vision, foot problems, Parkinson's disease, dementia, and even certain medications can increase your chance of falling. Dangerous things around the home – slippery throw rugs and poor lighting, for example – make falls more likely as well. If you are an older adult or you are in charge of care for an older person, please follow the steps below, and also get a “falls checkup” on a regular basis from your healthcare provider.

Did you know?



One in every three adults age 65 and older falls each year.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have had a fall

If you fall, let your healthcare provider know right away. It is important for you to tell them what might have caused the fall – whether you tripped over something, for instance, or got dizzy and lost your balance, or felt your legs “go out” from under you. This important information will be used to help you avoid falling again.

Review your medications

Put all of your medications – prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, vitamins or any other pills that you take – in a bag and bring them with you to your next visit with your healthcare provider. Together you can review your medications to see if any might increase your chance of falling. If so, your provider may change the dose, or prescribe another type of medicine for you.

Make a falls prevention plan with your healthcare provider

During your visit, your healthcare provider may also check your balance, leg strength, and function; your blood pressure, heart rate and rhythm; examine the way you walk; and test your vision.

Based on what your provider finds he or she may recommend certain exercises, physical therapy, balance training, a cane or walker, a change in the kind of shoes you wear or in your eyeglasses prescription, or reduce the dose of medications you are taking to lower your risk of falls.

Exercise to prevent falls

Exercise has been shown to decrease falls. Healthcare professionals recommend that older adults exercise at least three times a week. Find an exercise that you enjoy that promotes strength and balance - such as walking or a group Tai Chi class. If you prefer to exercise indoors, chair stands (repeated rising from a chair without using your arms) can be done alone and are beneficial.

Make your home safe from falls

- Keep cords away from areas where you walk
- Remove loose carpets and rugs or tack down the carpets and only use rugs with nonskid backing
- Add lights in dimly lit areas and at the top and bottom of stairs
- Use nightlights in bedrooms, halls, and bathrooms
- Clean up clutter, especially near staircases
- Put hand rails on both sides of any steps or stairs in or outside of your home
- Add "grab bars" near the toilet and bath tub, and no-slip decals or a rubber mat in the tub or shower
- Wear firm shoes with a back and a good grip on the bottom
- Avoid loose slippers or socks

What to Do if You Fall

Get Immediate Medical Attention

Even if you do not have an obvious injury, if you have any loss of consciousness or any sign of confusion after falling, seek immediate medical attention.

Notify Your Primary Healthcare Provider

Even if you have no injury, make an appointment with your healthcare provider. Your fall could be related to a medical problem, and a falls evaluation will be needed to find the cause and help prevent another fall.

Afraid of falling?

Build confidence and take control of your fear!

Things to know about falls.

- One out of three people over 65 years old will fall each year
- One out of two people over 85 years old will fall each year.
- Falling can be dangerous. Falls may cause broken bones, hospital visits, loss of the ability to take care of yourself, and sometimes even death.

Common things that cause people to fall.

- Decreased or bad eye sight
- Weak muscles
- Trouble keeping balance
- Side effects from medicine
- Bad lighting or dark areas in your house
- Uneven or slippery ground



Good News: You can change many of the things listed above. You can reduce your chance of falling!

What can I do to help stop myself from falling?

- Schedule an eye check up with your doctor.
- Exercise to improve strength and balance.
- Talk with your doctor about the side effects of your medicine.
- Remove things from the floor of your house that may cause you to trip like rugs, toys, and foot stools.
- Put nightlights in areas of your house where you walk when it is dark.

Where do I start?

1. Schedule an appointment for a health checkup with your doctor. Make sure to talk with him or her about your fear of falling. Ask about your medicine and if it has any side effects.
2. Start exercising. Use the exercises given below to improve your strength and balance. These two skills will help you decrease your chance of falling.

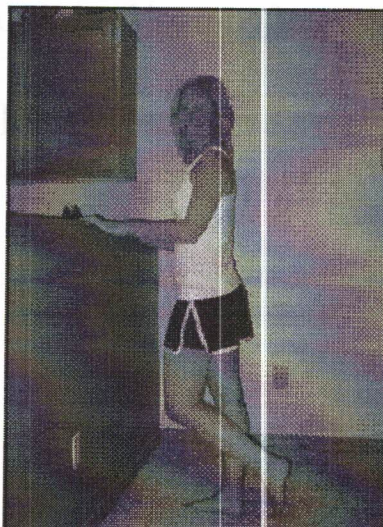
Exercise 1: Single leg balance

Stand on one leg for 15 seconds while holding on to something stable as shown in the picture. Repeat 6 times per leg. Try this once in the morning, near breakfast, and once before bed. If 15 seconds is too long at first, start with a shorter time like 5 seconds and add time as this becomes too easy.

Exercise 2: Sit to stand

Use a chair like the one in the picture that is stable and has armrests. Sit down in the chair and immediately stand back up. Repeat sitting and standing 10-15 times. Do this once in the morning and once at night. If 10-15 times is too hard, do as many as you can safely each time you try.

If you feel dizzy at any time during exercise 1 or 2 sit down until you feel better.



Other things to try!

- Community health programs
- Aquatic exercise
- Physical therapy

Make sure to ask your doctor about how to sign up.

References:

1. Falls among older adults: an overview. Center for Disease control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>. 10/6/2009. Accessed 7/27/2010.
2. Fuller, G.F. Falls in the elderly. American Academy of Family Physicians. <http://www.aafp.org/aafp/20000401/2159.html>. Accessed 7/27/2010.
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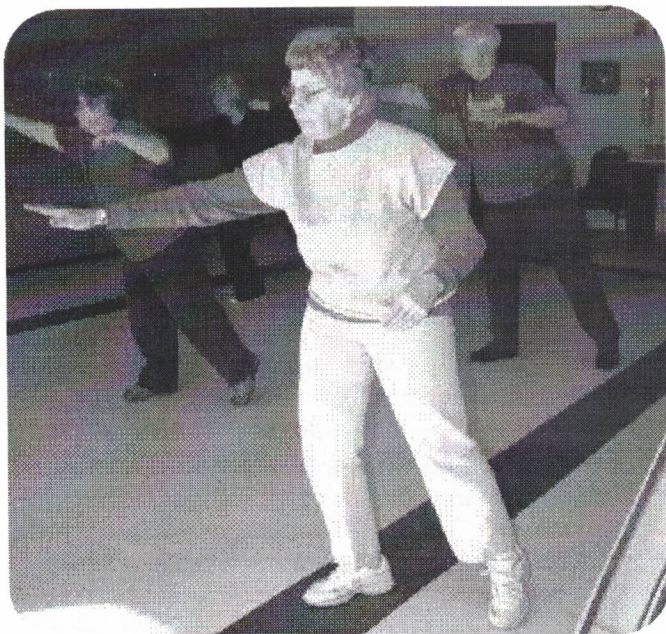
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Falls Prevention



Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. Falls threaten seniors' safety and independence and generate enormous economic and personal costs.

However, falling is not an inevitable result of aging. Through practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based falls prevention programs, and clinical-community partnerships, the number of falls among seniors can be substantially reduced.



The Challenge

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- One-fourth of Americans aged 65+ falls each year.
- Every 11 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall; every 19 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall.
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults.
- Falls result in more than 3 million injuries treated in emergency departments annually, including over 850,000 hospitalizations and more than 29,000 deaths.
- In 2015, the total cost of fall injuries was \$50 billion.
- The financial toll for older adult falls is expected to increase as the population ages and may reach \$67.7 billion by 2020.

Falls, with or without injury, also carry a heavy quality of life impact. A growing number of older adults fear falling and, as a result, limit their activities and social engagements. This can result in further physical decline, depression, social isolation, and feelings of helplessness.

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FALLS PREVENTION FACT SHEET



NCOA's Role

NCOA leads the National Falls Prevention Resource Center, which supports awareness and educational efforts about falls and promotes evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies across the nation. The purpose of the center is to:

- Increase public awareness and educate consumers and professionals about the risks of falls and how to prevent falls.
- Support and stimulate the implementation, dissemination, and sustainability of evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies to reduce the incidence of falls among older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Serve as the national clearinghouse of tools, best practices, and other information on falls and falls prevention.

The National Falls Prevention Resource Center leads the **Falls Free® Initiative**, a national effort to address the growing public health issue of falls, fall-related injuries and deaths. The initiative includes a coalition of over 70 national organizations charged with working toward the progress of one or more of the strategies in the National Action Plan. Members are engaged in disseminating proven falls prevention programs, advocating for funding, and educating older adults about how they can reduce their risk of falling. The initiative also includes a 42-member State Coalition on Falls Prevention Workgroup charged with collaboratively promoting effective strategies to address falls.

www.NCOA.org/FallsFreeInitiative

The Falls Free® Initiative's work includes:

Falls Free® National Action Plan

In March 2005, NCOA released the landmark evidence-based Falls Free® National Action Plan to prevent falls and fall-related injuries in older adults. The plan was updated in 2015 and continues to serve as a roadmap and catalyst for action. The plan includes goals, strategies and action steps to increase physical mobility, reduce the impact of medications as a falls risk factor, and improve home and environmental safety. The plan also promotes the expansion and funding of falls risk screening, assessment, and evidence-based programs.

National Falls Prevention Awareness Day

Every September on the first day of fall, the Falls Free® Initiative promotes National Falls Prevention Awareness Day. States are encouraged to host and promote falls prevention awareness and screening activities to draw attention to the problem and offer older adults practical solutions. Forty-two states and DC participated in the 2017 event.

www.NCOA.org/FPAD

For more information, please visit

www.NCOA.org/FallsPrevention.

For questions, please email fallsfree@ncoa.org

About NCOA

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) is a respected national leader and trusted partner to help people aged 60+ meet the challenges of aging. Our mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling. Through innovative community programs and services, online help, and advocacy, NCOA is partnering with nonprofit organizations, government, and business to improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020. Learn more at ncoa.org and @NCOAging.

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