

SEVEN WAYS

# Seniors can prevent falls

## Reduce the fear of falling

As we age, the fear of falling becomes top of mind. Often this fear keeps older adults from everyday activities such as visiting with friends, shopping or going for a walk.

Fear of falling can lead to a reduction in activity that affects their health. The good news is that seniors can ease this fear and remain both physically and socially active by practicing a few fall prevention guidelines.

If you have elderly parents, chances are they have already had a fall or two, and the reality is that they will fall again. Helping them now by going over the seven ways to prevent falls can save a trip to the hospital, and maybe their life. It's also an excellent time to talk with your parents to create a plan, should they fall.

If you're a senior and know exactly what we're talking about, take comfort in these seven ways you can prevent falls. It's also a good idea for you to discuss a plan with your family, neighbor or close friends you can contact should you ever fall and need help.

## First, understand the facts related to falls

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), millions of people ages 65 and older fall each year, making falls the leading cause of injury in this age group. More than one out of four older people fall each year, but less than half tell their doctor. And falling once doubles your chances of falling again.

One of the most severe fall injuries is a broken hip. Each year over 300,000 older people—those 65 and older—are hospitalized for hip fractures. It is difficult to recover from a hip fracture, and after such an injury, many people are not able to live on their own.



## Know the risk factors

Most falls are caused by a combination of risk factors, and the more risk factors a person has, the higher their chances of falling. According to the CDC, these risk factors include:

- **Lower body weakness**
- **Vitamin D deficiency**  
(that is, not enough vitamin D in your system)
- **Difficulties with walking & balance**
- **Use of medicines**  
such as tranquilizers, sedatives or antidepressants. Even some over-the-counter medicines can affect balance and how steady you are on your feet.
- **Vision problems**
- **Foot pain or poor footwear**
- **Home hazards or dangers**
- **Not getting enough sleep**

## Five age-related changes that increase senior fall risk

### Decreased strength

Muscle loss starts very early, around age 30. In older adults, less muscle means less strength and weaker bones.

### Weaker sense of balance

Many body systems work together to keep us standing upright. Age-related changes and medication side effects can make it more difficult for seniors to stay balanced.

### Declining eyesight

Vision helps us keep our balance and avoid obstacles. As vision worsens, so does the ability to stay upright and clearly see what's in our path.

### Loss of flexibility

Age and health conditions make seniors less flexible, especially in hips and ankles. This stiffness increases the likelihood of falling.

### Decreased endurance

## Seven things seniors can do to prevent falls

Falls are not a normal part of aging. You can avoid the risk of a fall by taking steps to stay safe and independent longer. Many of the risk factors can be changed or modified to help prevent falls. Learn what you can do to reduce your chances of falling:

### 1. Take home safety precautions

- Remove things you can trip over that are on the floor or steps.
- Secure small throw rugs in place with double-sided tape or non-slip backing.
- Keep frequently used items in cabinets you can reach without using a step stool.
- Get a safety grabber that helps retrieve items that are out of reach.
- Install grab bars in the bathroom, by the toilet and in the tub.
- Place a non-slip mat or anti-slip strips on the shower floor and in the bathtub.
- Use bright bulbs in lamps, consider curtains and drapes that reduce glare, and make sure staircases are well lit.
- Install handrails.
- Wear comfortable shoes with good support, whether you're in your home or outside.
- Make sure your clothing isn't too restrictive or loose, as both can cause imbalance or a fall.



## 2. Talk with your doctor

Ask your doctor to evaluate your risk for falling and discuss specific things you can do.

Ask your doctor to review your prescription and over-the-counter medicines to see if any might make you dizzy or sleepy.

Ask your doctor whether taking vitamin D supplements would be right for you.

## 3. Do strength and balance exercises

Ask your doctor to recommend helpful exercises that make your legs stronger and improve your balance.



## 4. Have your eyes examined

Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and update your eyeglasses if needed. If you have bifocal or progressive lenses, you may want to get a pair of glasses with only your distance prescription for outdoor activities, such as walking.

## 5. Consider assistive devices

Canes, walkers, wheelchairs and scooters can increase stability and prevent unexpected falls from occurring.

## 6. Use an in-home care service

A home care agency that specializes in services for seniors can provide a professional caregiver who will come to your home and help with daily activities. Having a helping hand is sometimes all that's needed to prevent a serious fall.



## 7. Choose sensible shoes

The Mayo Clinic recommends you consider changing your footwear as part of your fall-prevention plan. High heels, floppy slippers and shoes with slick soles can make you slip, stumble and fall. So can walking in your stockings. Instead, wear properly fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles. Sensible shoes may also reduce joint pain.

## Create an action plan

Whether you're an adult child of an aging parent or a senior concerned about falling, now is an opportune time to create a fall reduction plan with your family or friends.

Creating a plan begins with having a discussion with your parent or senior loved one.

## How to broach the subject with your aging parent(s)

If you're an adult child, you may have some trepidation about broaching the topic with your parents. You are not alone; many do. How do you begin the conversation?

A sensitive and meaningful way to begin the conversation is said best in the following excerpt from a Huffington Post article by Jim T. Miller, syndicated columnist, NBC Today contributor and creator of SavvySenior.org:

*Tell your parent that even though they are okay now, you're worried about their future safety if they were to fall and injure themselves and no one was around to help.*

*And, let them know the unsettling statistic that nearly 30 percent of U.S. seniors who fall suffer moderate to severe injuries that can make it hard to get around or live independently in their own home, and can increase their risk of an early death.*

*Be respectful with your comments, and try to avoid being bossy or overdramatic. And listen to your parent's thoughts, concerns or fears that they express.*

If you need some help, contact your parent's doctor to see if they could examine your mom or dad and talk to them about falls. Many seniors will often listen to their doctor before they will listen to their own family.

After you have your parent's attention, review the seven ways to prevent falls described above with them to create a personal plan for their surroundings. Many states, counties and cities have fall prevention programs for seniors. You can check whether one is available for your parent. If there is, perhaps your parent would be amenable to attending the program.

Once the discussion is finished, hopefully, your parent(s) will have peace of mind from knowing they have a plan of action that identifies falling traps, how to overcome them and what to do if they should fall.

**Let's help your senior prevent falls in their home with a free home safety assessment. Call today!**

