



Older Adult Falls

Each year, one in every three adults age 65 and older falls. Falls can lead to moderate to severe injuries, such as hip fractures and head traumas, and are the leading cause of injury death among those age 65 and older. As a caregiver for an older adult, it is necessary to understand the leading risks for falls and take measures to help keep your loved ones safe.



Environment – Most falls happen in homes and are entirely preventable. Simple changes in lighting, housekeeping and furniture arrangement can make older adults less susceptible to falling in their homes.

- All rooms in older adults' homes should be well-lit. Put in brighter light bulbs, add lighting to dark areas and install night-lights in bedrooms, bathrooms and hallways.
- Clutter and tripping hazards can cause a person of any age to fall. Make sure all pathways are clear and clean.
- Arrange furniture to ensure that there is always a clear pathway to enter and exit a room.
- Many falls occur on stairs and steps. All stairwells should be well-lit, clear of all objects and have handrails on both sides.

Health – Older adults with hip or bone weakness, arthritis, osteoporosis and blood pressure fluctuation are more prone for falls. Those suffering from neurological conditions, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease are at an increased risk for falling as well.

- Have a doctor assess an older adult's risk of falling and suggest changes in an older adult's medications or lifestyle to reduce the risk of falling.
- Let doctors know about past falls. A fall can be a sign of a new medical problem that needs attention.

Medication – Many medications have side effects that can affect an older adult's coordination and balance or cause dizziness, confusion or sleepiness.

- Ask a doctor or pharmacist to review all medications, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, and vitamins and minerals.
- Have an up-to-date list of all medications and provide it to doctors during visits.
- Make sure medications are properly labeled and there are clear instructions for usage.

Habits – Oftentimes, older adults fear that exercise may lead to a fall, but regular physical activity is the first line of defense against falls and fractures. Physical activity strengthens muscles and increases flexibility and balance.

- Many communities offer group exercise classes for older adults, such as water aerobics and tai chi, which uses slow, flowing movements to help relax and coordinate the mind and body. Contact your local community or senior center for classes.
- Mild weight-bearing exercise, like walking or climbing stairs, helps slow bone loss from osteoporosis and increases muscle strength.

Fear – Many people who fall, even if they are not injured, develop a fear of falling. This fear may cause them to limit their activities, leading to reduced mobility and loss of physical fitness, which in turn increases their actual risk of falling.

- Encourage older adults to stay active and exercise regularly.
- Doctors can refer older adults to physical therapists to help improve walking confidence.

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