

Preventing Falls

People do things all the time that may cause them to fall. Falls can cause serious injuries and even death. Falls can stop someone from doing what they enjoy, leading to loss of independence. A person of any age can experience a fall, but the chances increase when we age. The good news is that many falls can be prevented.

What puts someone at risk for falling?

There can be problems around you, such as:

- Poor lighting
- Steep or broken stairs
- Uneven floors—for example, moving from a hardwood floor to a carpet
- Uneven or broken streets or sidewalks
- Cluttered walkways—throw rugs, loose cords, small pieces of furniture, small kid or pet toys

Falls can also be caused by health issues, such as:

- Fatigue and stress
- Balance, hearing, or vision problems
- Muscle weakness or numbness
- Vitamin deficiency
- Typical aging
- A fall in the past
- Stroke, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, or other problems
- Some medications and even the number of prescription medications taken daily

Fear of falling

Some people develop a fear of falling, especially if they have fallen before. People can worry about falling and may stop going out or doing what they enjoy. They may have to rely on others to help them. A fear of falling puts the person at risk for more falls.

Preventing falls

- Start a conversation about falls with your loved ones and health care provider. Falls are not a natural part of aging and may be preventable. Your

health care provider can screen you for falling risks.

- Be careful in the bathroom because it can be a dangerous place. Getting in and out of the tub or shower is a common time for people to fall. Wet and slippery floors can make it easier to fall. To prevent falls in the bathroom:
 - Install grab bars inside and outside the tub or shower.
 - Install grab bars near the toilet for support.
 - Clean up wet areas and spills as quickly as possible.
 - Use nonslip mats or strips inside the tub or shower.
- Strengthen muscles with exercise: Sitting too much puts you at risk for falling! Many exercise programs improve strength and balance. For example, there are noted benefits with gentle yoga and tai chi. Learn about classes that target your own health conditions, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or Parkinson's disease.
- Learn about the medications you are taking. Some medications can weaken muscles and bones. Also, people who take four or more medications may be at risk for falling. Some medications are considered fall-risk inducing drugs (FRIDs). Ask your doctor or pharmacist about possible side effects of the medications you are taking. Tell your doctor about all the medications you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements, and vitamins.
- Keep your vision clear: Poor vision can make it harder to get around safely. To help make sure you're seeing clearly, have your eyes checked every year, and wear glasses or contact lenses with the correct prescription strength.
- Share symptoms of dizziness, vertigo, or imbalance with your health care professional: Experiencing any of these symptoms can put a person at greater risk of falling. Talking to your health care

professional can help to determine the cause and manage the symptoms. Brief vertigo (a spinning sensation) that happens when lying down, rolling over in bed, looking up, or bending over could be due to a common inner ear condition called [Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo or BPPV](#). This condition is more common in older adults, and it can be treated with therapy maneuvers.

- Have your hearing checked: Good hearing helps us notice sounds around us that can warn of danger. People who cannot hear well may stay by themselves and be less active. Reduced activity can put you at risk for falling.
- Make your house safer: About half of all falls happen at home. Use bright lightbulbs around the house to see better. Wear secure shoes, not slippers or flip-flops, inside and outside the house.
- Use contrasting colors at steps or thresholds so you can see them clearly. For example, if your bathroom is painted white, make sure the shower curtain is a different color and the edge of the shower is a contrasting color. On dark wooden floors, paint the edge of the steps a lighter color.
- **Keep emergency phone numbers in large print close by.**
- For more information about falls and preventing falls, visit the webpage of the initiative, Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries (STEADI), by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Look for the materials on the CDC website (www.cdc.gov). Search on the keyword STEADI.

Notes:

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For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit www.asha.org/aud/pei/.

For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



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