

# Are You at Risk for Falls?

Falls are the main cause for injuries in people 65 years of age and older. Falls can happen at any age, anytime and anywhere. Most falls happen in homes during common activities. Serious injuries can happen such as hip, spine or wrist fractures and head injuries. Tell your health care team if you have bleeding problems or a blood disorder. You may be at greater risk for serious injury if a fall occurs.

## Review the statements below to see if you may be at risk for falls.

- I have been told by my doctor, nurse or therapist to ask for help before getting up out of bed, off the toilet or standing from a chair.
- I have fallen or nearly fallen in the past.
- My age is 65 or older.
- I take more than 2 medicines, either prescription or over the counter medicines.
- I have weakness in my legs, have brittle bones, or a bone disease.
- I have other health problems, such as diabetes, history of seizures, or problems with my blood pressure.
- I have furniture, rugs or other items on the floor where I need to walk.
- I do not eat at least 3 meals a day that include a variety of foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, meats or other proteins.
- I do not always wear shoes on my feet that have good treads on the bottom.
- I do not have grab bars by the toilet and in the shower or tub.

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**Learn more about your health care.**



## **Prevent Falls**

If you checked one or more of the boxes above, you are at risk for falls. Here is some more information about each risk and how you can prevent falls.

- **Need help before getting up**
  - ▶ Loss of strength or balance can be from illness, certain medicines or treatments. An injury can also increase your chance of falling. Falls will most likely happen when you move from one position to another, such as getting out of bed or standing after sitting in a chair.
  - ▶ Ask for help before you try to get up on your own.
  - ▶ Be sure you are safe to get up on your own. If you feel at all lightheaded or dizzy, get help before getting up. If you are starting a new medicine or treatment that makes you feel weak, shaky or dizzy, get help.
- **Fell before**
  - ▶ If you have fallen before, you are at a greater chance of falling in the future.
  - ▶ If you fall, take notes about the fall. Mark the date, the time and where you were when you fell. How did it happen? What could have been done to prevent the fall? Learn from the fall to help prevent another fall in the future.
- **Your age**
  - ▶ People over age 65 are at greater risk for falls.
  - ▶ Exercise to improve your strength and balance.
- **Your medicines**
  - ▶ Taking multiple medicines can increase your risk for falls. Sleeping pills, blood pressure medicines, pain medicine and water pills are some examples of medicine that can cause you to have a higher risk for falls.
  - ▶ Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the medicines you take. Ask whether any side effects of the medicines alone or the medicines taken together could put you at risk for falls.

- **Other health problems**

- ▶ Many health problems can put you at risk for falling. If your blood pressure is low or you are not taking in enough fluids because you are nauseated, vomiting or have diarrhea, you could become dizzy and fall.
- ▶ Diabetes can cause loss of feeling in your feet or problems with your vision that can increase your risk for falls.
- ▶ Bone problems or bone disease can increase your risk for falls.
- ▶ Heart problems and blood pressure problems can cause you to feel weak, dizzy or lightheaded. These conditions put you at risk for falls.
- ▶ Having problems with leaking urine or having urgency to pass urine or diarrhea can increase your risk for falls. Talk to your doctor or therapist about exercises you can do to decrease urine leakage.
- ▶ Arthritis, strokes, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, seizures, and many other diseases can put you at risk for falls.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor about your health problems and any precautions you can take to prevent falls.

- **Furniture and other things on the floor**

- ▶ Remove all throw rugs and move area rugs from where you walk.
- ▶ Move furniture to decrease clutter and clear walk ways.
- ▶ Have cords and wires secured against the wall.
- ▶ Use your walker or cane when walking. Do not hold onto furniture to walk around.

- **Eating**

- ▶ Healthy eating can reduce your risk of falls.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor or a dietitian to check that you are getting enough vitamins and minerals in your diet. You may need to take a multiple vitamin each day or other supplements to keep your bones strong.
- ▶ Limit alcohol intake.

- **Footwear**

- ▶ Wear low heels or flat shoes with treads on the bottom or slippers with non-slip soles to prevent slipping. Do not walk around in your bare feet or socks.

- ▶ Do not wear shoes with open toes or open or high heels. They do not provide as much support and increase your risk for falls.
- **Use grab bars**
  - ▶ Place grab bars by the toilet and in the shower or bathtub.
  - ▶ Do not use towel bars for grab bars because they will not support your weight.

## **Exercise to improve your strength and balance**

Strong muscles help your balance. Talk to your doctor or therapist about what exercises may be right for you.

One exercise that is often safe and easy to perform is the sit-stand exercise.

1. Sit in a sturdy firm chair with armrests.
2. Stand up slowly, pushing off the armrests if needed.
3. Pause and get your balance. Be sure you are standing up straight.
4. Slowly sit back down into the chair.
5. Relax and then repeat.

Do this exercise 3 times a day. Try to do 10 to 20 repetitions each time.

## **What do I do if I fall?**

- If you fall, try to stay calm. Do not panic.
- Call for help if someone is there with you.
- Try to determine if you are hurt.
- If there is a chair or couch nearby, slide or crawl to it and try to get up.
- If you cannot get up, call for help.
- If you are alone, crawl slowly to the telephone and call 911 or a family member or neighbor to help.

For more information about fall prevention, ask for the handout called “Safety Tips to Prevent Falls at Home.”