

# Preventing Falls

**F**alls are the leading cause of injury and death among people aged 65 and older. Falls can often cause permanent disability—especially in older women. Because of lost bone density from osteoporosis, older women can easily break their hips during a tumble.

In addition to injuries caused by falls, just the fear of falling can be damaging in itself. Twenty percent of older people fear falling enough to limit their activities of daily living, thus diminishing their quality of life.

## WHO IS AT RISK

As people age, normal alterations in vision, gait, hearing and cognition increase the chance of falls. You may be at risk if you:

- are over 65 years old
- are thin, female, or of Caucasian or Asian descent
- have had prior stroke, or now have early-onset menopause, osteoporosis or a foot disorder
- have Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease or a family history of falls
- are on a low-calcium diet, are a smoker or drink an excessive amount of alcohol
- don't exercise
- have low blood pressure
- sway when you walk.

## PREVENTION

Falling doesn't have to be a natural consequence of aging. You can help prevent falls with lifestyle changes and some simple modifications.

- Exercise regularly. Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases the chances of falling. Exercises that improve balance, such as t'ai chi, are most helpful. But it's important to consult your doctor before starting programs.
- Have your vision checked regularly. You may be using an old prescription or have glaucoma or cataracts that restrict your vision.
- Talk to your doctors or pharmacist about the side effects of your medications, including over-the-counter medications. As you age, some medicines—and certain combinations of medicines—can make you drowsier or dizzier than before.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Be cautious when getting up from sleeping or from a seated position.

- Use a cane or walker for balance control and be careful on steps and curbs.
- Avoid icy patches in the winter. If the weather report predicts ice, snow or rain, don't go out alone, or consider staying in.
- Keep pathways and hallways clear of clutter and electrical cords.
- Tack down carpets and rugs or buy rugs with nonskid backing.
- Keep stairs and hallways brightly lit. Use sturdy handrails when walking down steps and affix no-slip treads to stairs.
- Re-arrange furniture to provide plenty of walking room. Use chairs with strong backs and tables with four sturdy legs. Make sure chairs and couches aren't too low to the ground. The lower the furniture, the more difficult it is to go from a seated to a standing position, and vice versa.
- In the bathroom, use a raised seat and safety rails for the toilet, and install handrails in the bathtub.
- Use slip-resistant strips, a shower seat or a rubber mat in the tub.
- Store items in waist-high cabinets and shelves in the kitchen. Avoid reaching for items that are placed too high to reduce the risk of losing your balance and falling while reaching.
- Put a rubber mat in front of the sink to avoid slipping on spilled water.

Combining these simple changes with good judgment can help you maintain your independence while protecting your quality of life. [n](#)

## Information adapted from:

- [n](#) Preventing Falls in Seniors. Accessed via [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
- [n](#) Fall Prevention. Accessed via [www.agenet.com](http://www.agenet.com).
- [n](#) Tips for Preventing Falls. Accessed via [www.jeffersonhealth.org](http://www.jeffersonhealth.org).

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