



Patient Information

Preventing Falls Among Older Adults

Falls are a serious health problem for older adults. Injuries from falls reduce mobility and independence and increase the risk of premature death. Each year, one in three adults 65 or older experiences a fall, and about 10,000 die from their injuries. About 60% of people who die from falls are 75 or older, and the chance that an older person will be severely injured in a fall and require hospitalization greatly increases with age. About half of the older patients released from the hospital after a fall experience some loss of independence as a result.

The fear of falling alone can cause older adults to feel afraid, confined, frustrated, angry and helpless, and these feelings can cause some people to restrict their own mobility and independence.

Aging and Falls

Body changes associated with aging can make a person more likely to fall. These include loss of endurance and muscle mass, arthritis and changes in balance and vision. Older adults are also more likely to be taking several prescription medications, which can cause dizziness, disorientation and the need to urinate, leading to frequent dashes to the bathroom.

You are at risk for falling if you:

- Experience lower body weakness
- Experience dizziness when standing or turning
- Have difficulty rising from a chair
- Have problems walking or balancing
- Have impaired vision
- Take four or more daily medications or any psychoactive medications
- Fall or trip more than once a year

You can reduce your risk if you:

- Keep active to improve strength and balance.
- Wear well-fitted shoes with high sides and sturdy soles. Avoid wearing socks alone or slippers with poor traction.
- Have your eyesight checked regularly. Don't walk around wearing your reading glasses.

- Ask your nurse practitioner to review all your medications —both prescriptions and over-the-counter products.

You can prevent falls in your home if you:

- Improve lighting. Make sure wall and lamp switches are easy to reach without stretching or bending over.
- Clear floors. Remove throw rugs, eliminate slippery flooring and minimize changes in walking surface.
- Keep sturdy furniture. You should be able to lean against furniture without moving it. Chairs should have armrests.
- Remove clutter. You can easily trip over extension cords, children's toys and piles of shoes or magazines — even if you know they're there.
- Install handrails. You should be able to grip handrails by encircling them with your thumb and fingers. Use handrails on both sides of stairways and in hallways.
- Install grab bars near the toilet and in the bathtub. Bars should be placed at a height and angle that are comfortable for you, with gripping space between bars and walls or other fixtures.
- Use no-slip mats in the bathroom and the laundry room.
- Place items you need within reach. It's easy to lose your balance when you're standing on a stool and reaching overhead.

What to do if you fall:

- Don't panic. Try to get help. Attract attention by banging on the floor or wall or using a personal alarm.
- Try to get up. Roll over onto your stomach and push yourself onto your knees. You can try to pull yourself up by grabbing onto or leaning against furniture or a wall.
- Keep warm. Cover yourself with whatever you find within reach or contract your muscles.

For more information about preventing falls, talk with your NP and visit these Web sites: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/falls.htm> and <http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/AdviceInfo/Slips+trips.htm>.

Additional Notes:

