

Your Care at Home: Preventing Falls

Narrator

Falls are more common as you get older and a broken bone can lead to more serious problems, so doing your best to prevent falls is really important. My friend and I will give you some pointers for preventing falls, and staying safe. Like my friend, you might be at risk for falling if you're recovering from an illness or injury, your vision is poor, or if you're unsteady on your feet. Some diseases and medicines can affect your balance or how you walk so you'll need to be extra careful to prevent falls.

The good news is there are lots of ways to prevent falls:

- Stay physically active. Or consider taking an exercise class. Regular exercise improves muscles and makes you stronger and more flexible. Simple things such as walking or climbing stairs may slow down bone loss.
- Upper body strength is important, too in protecting yourself if you do fall.
- Have your eyes and hearing tested every year because even small changes could make you unsteady.
- If you get new glasses, take time to get used to them.
- And do wear your glasses and your hearing aid if you have one. It makes a difference!
- If a medicine you're taking makes you sleepy or dizzy, mention that to your doctor or pharmacist.
- And make sure you get enough sleep. If you're tired, you're more likely to fall.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Even a small amount can affect your balance and reflexes.
- Stand up slowly. If you get up too fast, your blood pressure may drop, making you feel wobbly.
- If you use a cane or walker, **USE YOUR CANE OR WALKER**, especially in areas you don't know well or where the walkways are uneven.
- Be extra careful walking on wet or icy surfaces. Have someone spread sand or salt on icy areas by your doors.
- Wear good shoes. Non-skid, rubber- soled, low-heeled shoes help support your feet.
- And don't walk around in socks or in shoes or slippers with smooth soles. You can easily slip and fall without any traction on your feet.

There are many ways to make your home safer to prevent falls:

- Have handrails secured on both sides of the stairs, and **USE THEM**. If you must carry something while you're on the stairs, hold it in one hand and use the railing with the other.
- Keep areas where you walk clutter-free and well lit. Don't leave books, clothes, and shoes on the floor or stairs.
- Check that all carpets and rugs are fixed firmly to the floor so they won't slip, and this goes for every room in your home. Either get rid of throw rugs all together, or put no-slip strips on them so **YOU** won't slip when you walk on them.
- In the bathroom, mount grab bars near toilets and on the inside **AND** outside of your tub or shower.
- Place non-skid mats, strips, or carpet on all surfaces that might get wet, including outside your shower or tub.
- Consider installing a shower door instead of a curtain. Shower curtains won't help support you if you start to fall.
- Remember to turn on night-lights.
- In your bedroom, put night-lights and the phone close to your bed.
- Keep a flashlight handy and consider a portable commode near your bed so you don't have to walk to the bathroom at night.
- Elsewhere in your home, keep phone and electric cords out of the way so you don't trip on them.
- Arrange furniture (especially low coffee tables) so they're not in your way when you walk.
- And make sure sofas and chairs are the right height for you to get in and out of easily.
- Never walk on newly washed floor, they are slippery.

- Don't stand on a chair or table to reach something that's too high. Ask for help or use a reach stick, a special grabbing tool that you can buy at a hardware or medical-supply store.
- If you use a step stool, make sure it has wide steps and a handrail on top. Have someone with you when you use it.
- Be aware of your pet whenever you're standing or walking so they don't trip you.
- Have a cordless phone with you at all times. That way you won't have to rush to the phone when it rings and it'll be handy if you fall.
- Know the emergency number to call.
- You might want to also ask your doctor about a home safety assessment. This means a professional would come into your home and offer tips and advice on how to make it...AND YOU... safer.