

VITRA Health

Caregiver Education October Edition

Fall Prevention



Fall prevention tips and informational resources

The good news: Older adult falls are preventable. Learn what you can do to reduce your risk of injury. There is a common misconception that falling for older people should simply be an expected part of the experience of aging. This is not true. There is now a strong body of research evidence demonstrating that most falls are preventable and that fall risks can be greatly reduced by making some simple lifestyle changes.

Falls prevention tips:

Here are some tips for older adults to follow to help avoid falls and continue to live a healthy independent life:

- **Stay active**
Regular exercise that improves leg muscle strength and balance can reduce your risk for falls. Check with your health care provider to decide the best type of activity for you. Taking an evidenced-based Tai Chi class is one good example that can help prevent falls. Contact a local senior center/council on aging, gym, or YMCA to find out what programs are available in your community.
- **Talk openly to your health care provider about falls**
If you fall once, you raise your risk for falling again. Make sure you inform your Health Care Provider if you fall, or even if you just feel unsteady when you walk or worry about falling. Ask your health care provider to perform a fall risk assessment so that they can identify the best ways or interventions that will help lower your individual risk for falls. For example, this might include referring you to participate in an evidence-based falls-related program like “A Matter of Balance” in your community, referring you for physical therapy or podiatric (foot) care, changing your current medications, or ordering a home safety assessment that leads to installing grab bars in your bathroom, etc.
- **Regularly review your medication list with your health care provider or pharmacist.**
Ask your health care provider or pharmacist to review all the medicines you take, including vitamins and over the counter drugs. Certain medications or combinations of medications may have side effects, especially as you get older that can make you feel dizzy or sleepy, raising your risk for falling. Your health care provider may be able to change the medications you are prescribed or reduce the dosage to lessen your fall risk. Make sure you report any medication concerns you have to your health care provider or pharmacist.

- **Have your vision, hearing and feet checked at least once a year**
Your chances of falling are increased if your vision is poor, or you have a medical condition such as glaucoma or cataracts that may limit your eyesight. Hearing loss is also linked to an increase in fall risk. Certain foot problems or conditions, for example, bunions can cause pain and interfere with your balance and gait raising your risk for falls. Footwear should also be checked (shoes with non-skid soles are recommended). Talk to your health care provider to make sure these three areas are checked once a year and you are referred to any needed specialists.
- **Make your home safer**
There are some simple ways you can make your home a safer environment and also eliminate certain fall hazards. Get rid of any clutter on the floor especially in areas where you most frequently walk; improve the lighting especially on places like stairs; remove all throw rugs or secure them with double-sided tape; have handrails installed on staircases; add grab bars for support in the bathroom and make sure your tub or shower areas include non-slip mats.

Informational resources on how to prevent falls

- National Council on Aging-Center for Healthy Aging
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Health in Aging Foundation-American Geriatrics Society
- National Institutes of Health-National Institute on Aging (NIA)
- Fall Prevention Center of Excellence
- Falls Prevention and Intervention Strategies — Eunice Kennedy Shriver Center, UMass Medical Center

Source: Mass.gov