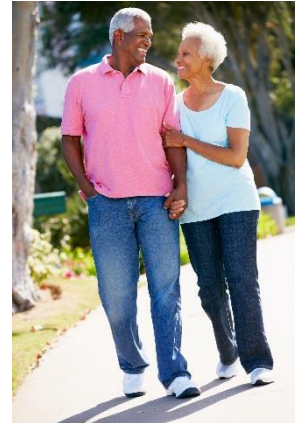


Older adults are at increased risk of falling.

Every year, one third of adults 65 or older falls and over 2 million of these falls result in emergency room visits. The risk of falling increases with each decade of life.¹ As we age, we tend to become less active, thus, causing us to naturally lose coordination, flexibility, and balance.² In addition, older adults are likely to having chronic diseases that result in loss of function and inactivity.³ Combined, these risk factors make older adults especially prone to falling. The good news is that there are simple steps you can take to help stay safe and reduce your risk of falling.



Awareness is critical.

How often do you walk from point A to point B without even thinking about what you are doing? Maybe you are in your home and walking a route you walk each day. You probably are not paying attention to the misplaced chair or tangled cord because you are accustomed to walking this path and do not expect to encounter obstacles. Falls can be easily prevented if you take the time to become aware of your surroundings. When walking, stay focused on your path and don't get distracted by the people around you or the television and refrain from talking on the telephone while walking. Simply taking the time to observe your surroundings can save you from the pain of falling.

Falling becomes more dangerous as you age.

As you age, your body is more prone to injuries and takes longer to recover from them. In your 20s, if you fell, you were probably able to get up, brush yourself off and move on with your day. In your 30s, you have had a little bruise from the fall, but were good to go the next day. In your 40s, you probably had a larger bruise and were in pain for a few days. In your 50s, it took even longer to recover from a minor fall. As you get into your 60s, 70s and beyond, you are much more likely to break or fracture a bone when you fall. This can cause you to need surgery, which makes you immobile for an even longer period of time.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

² National Council on Aging

³ National Council on Aging

Although you are still mentally alert, and may even be physically fit, your body is still older, and it will naturally take longer to recover from any injury. As you age, your bones become more brittle and you lose muscle mass, both of which contribute to more serious injuries and longer recovery time.⁴ The most important thing you can do is prevent injury in the first place by becoming aware of how to lower your risk of falling.

What can you do to lower your risk?



Exercise: Lack of exercise can lead to weak legs and loss of coordination, flexibility, and balance. Exercising more, even for just 10 minutes a day, can greatly reduce your chance of falling.⁵ A great way to increase strength and improve flexibility is by practicing yoga or tai chi. Going for a walk each morning or evening can help too. Water aerobics is an excellent way to be active, without straining your muscles too much. You will strengthen your muscles and bones, but not suffer the pain that is often associated with more strenuous activities.⁶ It doesn't matter how you do it, just get out and be active! If you are worried that you may fall or injure yourself while exercising, talk to your medical professional. He or she will be able to offer suggestions that are right for you.

Monitor medications: Some medications, or combinations of different medicines, can cause drowsiness or dizziness, which increases the risk of falling. Before taking any new medication, talk to your medical professional about the potential side effects and the interactions between multiple medicines.⁷

Manage diseases: Chronic diseases, such as diabetes, stroke, and arthritis, can result in a loss of function or inactivity, making falls more common. More than 90% of older adults have at least one chronic condition, making them extremely susceptible to falls. If you suffer from one of these diseases, talk with your medical professional about how you can manage your symptoms to decrease your fall risk.⁸



⁴ Medline Plus

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

⁸ National Council on Aging

Have your vision checked: As you age, less light reaches the retina, making it harder to see clearly.⁹ Having poor vision makes it more difficult for you to get around safely and increases your risk of falling. It is recommended that you get your eyes checked annually and make sure to wear glasses or contact lenses as prescribed by your doctor.¹⁰

Fall-proof your home: About half of all falls occur in the home. Fortunately, there are many ways you can make your home safer and reduce your fall risk. Move items that you could easily trip over, such as electric cords, garden hoses, and shoes, out of the walkway. Install handrails on staircases and remove rugs or use double sided tape to keep them from slipping. Install grab bars in your tub or shower and next to the toilet and use non-slip mats in the bathrooms. Store frequently used items at easily accessible levels, so that you do not need to use a step stool. Install brighter lights in your home so that you are able to see well.¹¹

Wear sensible shoes: High heels, shoes with slippery soles, and improperly fitted shoes can cause you to slip and fall. Wear properly fitting, sturdy shoes with non-slip soles. Likewise, walking around your house in slippers or socks can also be dangerous. Take off your socks and shoes while you are at home, or wear non-slip shoes around your house.¹²



Long-term consequences of falling:

Falls can result in hip fractures, broken bones, and traumatic brain injuries.¹³ Sometimes, surgery (e.g., hip or knee replacements, back surgery) is necessary after a traumatic fall. Even when falls do not result in injury, they can still take an emotional toll, for example, individuals may become fearful or even depressed and oftentimes feel a loss of independence.¹⁴

⁹ National Council on Aging

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

¹² Mayo Clinic

¹³ National Council on Aging

¹⁴ National Council on Aging



Sources



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