

A matter of balance

A fall for a senior is not simply a matter of shaking it off and standing back up. A fall could mean a broken hip or a bruise, and some seniors really “can’t get up.” Falls are a major threat to the health and independence of older adults.

The best solution is preventing falls in the first place. And a recent study in the *British Medical Journal* pointed to the success of exercise programs in reducing falls that cause injuries and broken bones.

Risk factors for falls include muscle weakness, especially in the legs, and poor balance—all linked to lack of exercise or certain medical conditions. Poor vision and confusion can also lead to falls. Even some medications can cause dizziness. To lower your risk for falls, CDC recommends you do four things:

1. Exercise to improve balance and strength.

Walking, using a stretch band and lifting weights increase muscle strength. Yoga and tai chi improve balance. Follow your doctor’s advice for exercise.

2. Have your doctor or pharmacist review all prescribed and over-the-counter medications you take.

Some, when taken alone or with other medications or alcohol can make you dizzy or sleepy and raise your risk for falls. Also, let your doctor know if you feel lightheaded when you get up from sitting in a chair or out of bed. Before you get out of bed, sit on the edge of it for a minute or two and get up slowly.

3. Get an eye exam from an eye doctor at least once a year.

Follow his or her advice for wearing corrective lenses and/or using low-vision aids. Get treatment for cataract, glaucoma, macular degeneration and other eye conditions as needed.

4. Make your house safer.

- Keep the inside of your house well lit. Use night lights.
- Have secure handrails on both sides of all stairs.
- Keep stairs and walk paths clear from clutter and tripping hazards.
- Install grab bars in the tub/shower and next to the toilet. If needed, use a shower chair that has rubber tips on the legs and a hand-held shower.
- If you use throw rugs, use ones with nonskid backs. Or, put nonslip rug pads or carpet tape underneath rugs.
- Wear sturdy shoes with thin, nonslip soles. Avoid going barefoot.
- Avoid using a step ladder or a chair to stand on. Keep items you use often in easy-to-reach places.
- Be mindful of where your pet and his or her toys are to avoid tripping over them.



1 in 3
PEOPLE
age 65 & Older
fall each year

Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of both

NONFATAL & FATAL INJURIES

Each year, at least

25,000
OLDER ADULTS

DIE **as a result of falls**

Source: CDC