

Fall Risk Factors compiled by SeniorNavigator.com

[Easy Exercises to Improve Balance](#)

Falls and unsteady gait lead to more than one million fractures each year. Unintentional injuries, predominantly caused by falls, are the sixth leading cause of death in persons over 65 years of age. Fear of falling and difficult ambulation greatly limit freedom of movement, and therefore, limit quality of life, for 25 to 40 percent of persons over 65.

Fall Risk Factors include:

- Medications (especially sedatives)
- Weakness and loss of feeling in the feet and legs
- Sudden drop in blood pressure with position change from sitting to standing ("postural hypotension")
- Vision problems
- Lessened bone density (osteoporosis)
- An unusual balance or step pattern
- Dizziness
- Alcohol use
- Environmental hazards (scatter rugs, stairs, pets, slippery bathtubs or showers, furniture placement and spills)
- Mental changes
- Neurological diseases such as Parkinson's disease or stroke
- Any health change resulting in illness

Common age-related changes that can affect your stability include:

- Shorter step length
- Improper footwear
- Increased time spent with both feet on the ground
- More tendency to sway
- Visual changes
- Slower reactions to position changes

Often it is not just one, but some combination of the above factors that causes a person to fall. However, there are things you can do to lessen your risk.

Fall Prevention

Approximately one third of older adults fall every year. Half of these individuals experience multiple falls. Age increases walking problems, which are associated with both disability and falls in older adults. It is estimated that approximately 20% of older adults have difficulty walking, and this increases to as much as 50% of the population 85 years of age and older. Most walking problems are associated with underlying diseases (arthritis, dementia, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, cancer, vision, etc.) or injuries (fractures, traumas), increasing ones risk of falling. Problems with mobility and fear of falling can impact a

person's ability to successfully perform normal activities of daily living. The following are some ideas on how to help you and/or your loved ones to prevent falls and fall related injuries.

Make Your Home Safer

Statistics show between 50-75% of falls occur at home, depending on age. Take the following steps to make your living space more fall proof:

- Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Install handrails and lights in staircases.
- Get rid of small throw rugs, or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs in place.
- Keep frequently used items in cabinets or storage areas that you can reach easily (without using a step stool).
- Install grab bars next to your toilet and your tub or shower.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Improve the lighting in your home, including night-lights in bedrooms and hallways. Turn on the lights when entering your house or a room at night.
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades, and partially closing blinds and drapes at certain times of day.
- Remove electrical wiring across floors.
- Rearrange furniture to provide clear pathways within rooms.
- Use assistive devices to help with stability and balance.
- Inspect your feet daily if you are diabetic.
- Choose proper footwear for both indoor and outdoor activity, avoiding thick soles and heels.
- Avoid traveling over slippery or uneven surfaces that may provide instability. Watch out for sidewalk cracks, uneven paving stones and curbing, uneven lawn and garden.

Begin a Regular Exercise Program

Exercise is one of the most important ways to reduce falls because it increases strength and agility, lessening the likelihood of a fall. Ask your doctor or health care worker about the best type of exercise program to meet your specific needs. This could also involve professional exercise or physical therapy.

Review Your Medicines

As you get older, the physical effects of some medicines-or combination of medicines-can change. Some can lead to falls by making you drowsy or light-headed. An increased risk of falling has been associated with recent dosage changes, and/or the number of medications one person takes, and when. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review all the medications you take, including over-the-counter medicines, and see if adjustments can be made to minimize your risk of falls.

Check Your Vision

Poor vision can increase your chances of falling. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have an undiagnosed eye condition that limits your vision. Have your vision checked regularly by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Get a Balance Screening

There are numerous assessments available to identify walking problems and your risk of falling, and to assist in identifying the underlying problem. A physical exam performed by your health care provider may uncover health issues such as blood pressure, vision, limbs, joints, and spine, which can contribute to walking problems. Additional tests for balance, coordination, strength, tone, sensation, body posture, agility, and gait can also assist in diagnosing the issue in order to make proper referrals to a specialist or physical therapist to further diagnosis and treat any deficits. Additional neurological testing, x-rays, and CAT scans, etc. may be ordered if there is a specific problem suspected.

The first step is to tell your healthcare provider that you fell, or are sometimes dizzy or unbalanced when standing. Investigating the problem will help to avoid another fall(s) in the future, which could bring more serious injury.