

*"Many falls are preventable. Knowing what causes most falls is one of the best ways to prevent them." - Harvard Health Publishing*

### Individual Risk Factors for Falls

- Difficulty with walking and balance
- Lack physical or mental exercise
- Poor eating habits, eating unhealthy foods, or not drinking enough water
- Various medical conditions and medications may increase the risk of falls.
  - Stroke, Arthritis, or vestibular problems
  - Blood pressure medications



### Tips for Fall Prevention

- **Physical Exercise** – Better strength and balance can lower risk of falls. Walking, body weight exercises, and weightlifting can help improve your strength. Yoga, Pilates, and Tai chi are great ways to work on balance and flexibility. A physical therapist (PT) and occupational therapist (OT) can help you create an exercise routine.
- **Exercise your mind** – Sometimes not paying attention can cause a fall. To sharpen your mind, work on more than one task at a time. A speech therapist or OT can give you things to do at home.
- **Nutrition and health** – Eating too little or unhealthy foods can lead to weakness and bone loss, making it easier to fall or cause more injury after a fall. A dietician can help. Keep up with annual physicals and ask your doctor about taking Vitamin D to improve bone, muscle, and nerve health. Make sure to drink enough water.
- **Medications** – Talk with your health care team about your list of medications and supplements. Some medications can make you feel off balance, drowsy or lightheaded, which could lead to a fall.
- **Diabetes management** – Keep your blood sugar at a stable level to prevent feeling faint. In the long run, it can prevent damage to eyesight, weakness, or losing foot sensation.
- **Vision** – Follow up with yearly vision check-ups and be sure to have eyeglasses checked. Brain injury or stroke may affect your ability to judge distance, ability to see clearly, and deal with changes in lighting. Work with a neuroptometrist, a specialist in vision after brain injury and occupational therapist (OT) to help with individual vision challenges.
- **Ear disorders** – After a head injury, sudden changes in head position or certain activities may trigger dizziness, vertigo, or loss of balance. It is important to talk with an ENT doctor and a PT for treatment.
- **Dizziness** – Blood pressure can drop when you go from lying down to sitting up, or from sitting to standing making you feel dizzy, light-headed, or weak. Do not walk if you feel dizzy and drink 6-8 glasses of water each day—unless you have been told to limit your fluid intake. Talk with your doctor about what you can do.



- **Foot care** – Foot pain or poor footwear can increase risk of falls. Do not wear slippers and socks or go shoeless. Make sure shoes fit well, have good support, and have thin, non-slip soles. See a foot specialist and PT. Always wear the recommended foot braces or orthotics for weakness or decreased sensation in the feet.
- **Always wear helmets** – When riding bikes, skates, skateboards, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, and horses or when playing contact sports such as football, softball, or skiing, make sure to wear a helmet.
- **Assistive devices** – Your Physical Therapist (PT) can recommend the right walking device such as a walker, cane, or wheelchair. Make sure they are fitted to your size and replace worn out or broken parts such as tips of walkers and canes.
- **Choose a safer way to do things** – Leave big jobs like gutter cleaning or painting the house to the professionals. Keep everyday items within easy reach, take your time, and pay attention. Avoid walking on wet surfaces, clean up spills, and don't rush. Ensure all rooms are well-lit and bedside lights are within easy reach. Use night lights in the bedroom and/or bathroom.
- **Transfers** – If you are helping someone move from a chair/couch, bed, or car, make sure you have been trained by a professional to use good body positioning. A Physical Therapist (PT) can teach you how to transfer others safely.
- **Home modifications** – Most falls happen in the home. Speak with your PT and OT and review the [Functioning Safely in the Home](#) for ideas on home layouts.
  - Keep stairs and floors clutter-free and remove cords. Remove loose rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping. Put railings on both sides of stairs. Keep items you use often in easy reach without needing to use a step stool or chair.
  - For bathrooms, add grab bars and non-slip mats in and outside of tubs, showers and next to the toilet.
  - Add brighter lighting to home and stairs, use motion-activated night-lights, and keep flashlights handy. Lampshades and frosted bulbs help with glare.
- **Depression** – Symptoms of depression can make you less aware of your surroundings and slow your ability to react quickly. A psychologist or counselor can help with strategies.

**Speak up and talk openly** – Speak with your loved one and their healthcare providers about fall risks and prevention. If your loved one has fallen, if they seem unsteady, or are worried about falling, tell a medical provider. Keep a cell phone close with programmed emergency numbers or use a medical alert system monitoring service.

### Additional Comments:

