

A Fall Prevention Checklist and Guide



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The Prevention of Falls

Did you know?

- A third of people over 65 years of age, and one half of people aged over 80 years have a fall at least once a year.
- Some of these people have multiple falls.
- One third of these falls require some medical attention
- Half of all falls happen in and around the home.

Fear of falling leads to decreasing ability to walk safely. Falls may contribute to depression, feeling of helplessness and social isolation. A few simple steps can reduce your risk of falling. This checklist is a guide to those steps. It suggests ways you can help prevent falls. Most changes are easy and inexpensive.

*It's up to you
to take steps
to prevent
a fall.*



Check yes or no in the box next to the question and continue reading for suggestions on how to reduce your chance of falling.



Exercise

yes no Do you exercise regularly (e.g., walking, swimming, yoga, aqua fitness, strengthening exercises)?

Exercise Suggestions

- Think of movement as an opportunity not an inconvenience.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
- Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity for most, preferably all, days.
- Exercises that strengthen your thigh and bottom muscles and improve your balance will help reduce your risk of falling.

Medicines

yes no Have you discussed all the medicines you take (including non-prescription medicines) with your doctor or pharmacist in the last 12 months?

yes no Are you confident you are taking your medicine as prescribed?

yes no Are all medicines stored in original clearly marked containers?

yes no Have all outdated medicines been discarded?

Medicine Suggestions

Have your medicines checked.

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your medicines and ask them to review your medicines regularly. Always do this if you have had a fall or feel unsteady on your feet.

Ask About Side Effects and Other Medicines Information.

For example:

- What can I do to reduce the chance of side effects?
 - Medicines are taken for particular conditions but there may be some ways to reduce possible side effects and the risk of falling. Sometimes you can be prescribed a different medicine.
 - Be aware that medicines can react with one another.
- Can you give me any information about this medicine?
 - Most medicines have Consumer Medicines Information, which is written to help consumers/patients.



Keep a List

- Keep a list of all your medicines. Your doctor or pharmacist can print one for you. Remember to add any over-the-counter medicines you have purchased or any other ‘natural’ medicines and vitamins you may be taking. It is a good idea to include the strength, dose and directions of these medicines and vitamins.
- Read the label on your medicines and the literature received from the pharmacy.
- The label may include a warning that the medicine may cause dizziness or that it should not be taken with alcohol.

Make an appointment to see your doctor if:

1. You have had a fall in the last 12 months
2. You feel unsteady on your feet
3. You are afraid of falling.

Your doctor will try to find the cause of your symptoms, will check your medicines and discuss the possibility of using a walking aid such as a cane.

Remember:

Clothing, Feet and Footwear

- yes no Do you have foot pain that affects your walking?
- yes no Do your shoes have a firm, rubber sole that bends at the ball of your foot?
- yes no Is the heel of your shoe slightly rounded, broad and less than one inch high?
- yes no Do your shoes fit well and are they in good repair?
- yes no Do you avoid wearing slippers or loose fitting shoes?
- yes no Does your clothing fit securely with no dangling hems or belts that could cause a fall?
- yes no Do you sit when dressing?

Clothing, Feet and Footwear Suggestions

- Ensure your shoes are in a good state of repair.
- Avoid wearing socks without shoes, loose fitting slippers, shoes with slippery soles, high heels or pointed toes. Avoid long flowing clothes/belts that drag close to the floor.

Vision

- yes no Have you had your eyes examined in the last 12 months?
- yes no Do you have dryness of the eyes?
- yes no Do you regularly clean your glasses?

Vision Suggestions

- Have your eyes checked every 12 months. Many changes in your vision happen gradually and are not always noticeable.
- Wear distance glasses if needed when you are walking.
- If you are concerned with eye dryness your doctor can prescribe eye drops or over the counter refresh eye drops.
- Wear a hat and/or sunglasses when you are outside to reduce glare and make it easier to see.
- Keep your glasses nearby and clean them regularly.

Osteoporosis and Nutrition

- yes no Have you become shorter over the years?
- yes no Do you have back pain that started suddenly?
- yes no Have you had any broken bones in the past few years?
- yes no Do you do weight-bearing exercise three to four times a week? (That is exercise in which you support your own weight such as walking, dancing, etc.)
- yes no Do you have three to four servings of high calcium foods each day (e.g. milk, yogurt, cheese, salmon or sardines)?

Osteoporosis and Nutrition Suggestions

- If you answered yes to the first question you may qualify for medicine to reduce osteoporosis. Discuss this with your doctor.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can – especially activity where you are putting weight on your legs.
- Eat three to four servings of high calcium food each day (e.g. milk, yogurt, cheese, salmon or sardines) and/or take calcium tablets, as needed. See your doctor or dietician for further advice.

Continence

- yes no Do you sometimes need to rush to go to the toilet?
- yes no Do you sometimes lose control of your bladder or bowel?
- yes no Do you sometimes have to jump out of bed and rush to the bathroom to prevent bed wetting at night?

Continence Suggestions

- Incontinence can be a common problem as you grow older. Your doctor or health care professional can help you.
- Consider wearing continence pads or pull-ups.
- Consider a commode next to your bed.
- Consider a waterproof bed sheet.

Other

- yes no Do you ask someone to help you with odd jobs that are in high and hard to reach places?
- yes no Do you have pets moving around your home?
- yes no Is your walking aid (if used) fitted for your height and in good repair and safe to use?
- yes no Do you know where to get your walking aid (if used) repaired?

Other Suggestions

- Many falls result from trying to do jobs that are hard to reach. It is not recommended that you climb on step ladders, or any other object. Save these jobs for someone else.
- If you must reach up for a high object, use an extension grabber. (This device can be purchased in drug and mobility equipment stores.)
- Be aware of where your pets are so you don't fall over them.
- Use your walking aid at all times. Replace or repair walking aids that are deteriorating or feel unsteady.



Fall Prevention: Around Your Home



Bedroom

- yes no Can you turn on a light before getting out of bed?
- yes no Can you easily get in and out of your bed?
- yes no Do you have a telephone by your bed?
- yes no Is your bedspread clear of the floor, so that you don't trip on it?
- yes no If you use walking aids, are they easy to reach before you get out of bed?

Bedroom Suggestions

- Have a light within reach of your bed. Consider a flashlight or nightlight.
- Your bed should be at a height that is easy for you to get on and off. A firm mattress provides support. This will make getting in and out of bed easier.
- Get out of bed slowly – roll to your side then sit up before you stand. If you are feeling dizzy after sitting up, wiggle your feet for a few minutes and wait for any dizziness to settle completely before standing.
- Keep a nightlight on for a clear view of the bathroom for night visits.
- Keep the floors clear in your bedroom. Loose mats, furniture and other obstacles can cause a fall.
- Secure loose telephone and electrical cords in the bedroom and out of walkways. They may need to be taped firmly down.
- If you wear glasses, make sure they are easy to reach as you get out of bed.

Bathroom and Toilet

- yes no Do you use non-slip floor mats in your bathroom?
- yes no Are the soap, shampoo and towel within easy reach so that you don't have to bend or reach too far?
- yes no Do you have handrails in the bath/shower and at the toilet?
- yes no Are you able to get on and off the toilet easily?
- yes no Are you able to walk directly into your shower without stepping over a raised edge? (Or is your shower in your bathtub?)

Bathroom and Toilet Suggestions

- Wet areas are more likely to be slippery and dangerous. Take extra care if the floor is wet.
- Non-slip flooring is recommended for bathrooms. Rubber mats or self-adhesive non-slip strips are advisable in the shower.
- Tub baths are not recommended. Tubs are most difficult to get in and out of and create a hazard for falling. A shower bench is recommended so you can sit while bathing.
- Handrails are recommended around the bath and toilet where you need something for balance.
- Your health care provider can advise you on equipment and changes that you can make to your bathroom. This will improve your safety and independence.

Floors

- yes no Do your floor coverings lie flat without wrinkles or curled edges?
- yes no Do you have loose mats or small rugs around the house?
- yes no Are your floors free of clutter?
- yes no Are all cords safely away from walkways?
- yes no Are your floor surfaces non-slip?

Floors Suggestions

- You are less likely to slip on surfaces such as carpet or unglazed tiles. Polished floors and shiny tiles can be very slippery.
- There are also non-slip products from hardware stores to make your floors less slippery.
- Remove all loose mats or throw rugs or make sure they are firmly secured with non-slip rubber backing.
- Make sure your carpets are in good condition. You can trip on holes and curled up edges of your carpet.
- Wipe up spills straight away. Some floor surfaces are slippery when wet.

Lighting

- yes no Are your lights bright enough for you to see well?
- yes no Are your stairs and steps well lit?
- yes no Are your light switches easy to reach and near each doorway?
- yes no Can you switch on a light from your bed easily?
- yes no Is there good lighting where you keep medicines?

Lighting Suggestions

- 75-watt bulbs are recommended in all rooms, passageways and stairwells.
(Note that some light fixtures take a maximum of 60 watts.)
- Nightlights are an inexpensive way to light up dark passageways at night.
- Consider installing movement-activated lights in your hallways.
- Automatic lights that turn on when it gets dark are also available. These are called photoelectric lights.
- Have extra lights installed or put lamps in dark areas.
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust when you walk between light and dark areas.

Stairs, Steps and Ladders

- yes no Are you able to see the edges of the steps clearly?
- yes no Are stairs and steps well lit?
- yes no Is there a light switch at the top and bottom of your stairs?
- yes no Are non-slip strips or paint used on the edges of each outdoor step?
- yes no Are your steps in good condition?
- yes no Do your steps have a sturdy handrail?
- yes no Do you use step ladders?

Stairs, Steps and Ladders Suggestions

- Stairs may need extra lighting.
- Place a brightly colored, securely attached strip on the edge of any steps.
- Make sure there are handrails on at least one side of all stairways.
- Handrails on both sides of steps are preferable where possible.
- Move frequently used items to within easy reach to reduce the need for reaching over your head.
- Have someone else use a ladder for tasks that require one. (NEVER CLIMB ON ANYTHING!)



Kitchen

- yes no Can you easily reach kitchen items you use regularly without climbing, bending or upsetting your balance?
- yes no Is there good lighting over your work areas?
- yes no Do you clean up spills straight away?

Kitchen Suggestions

- Arrange your kitchens so the most frequently used items are easy to reach and on the lower cabinet shelves.
- Counters and tables should be sturdy enough to support your weight if you lean on them. Collapsible tables such as a card table should not be used.



Living Room

- yes no Can you get out of your lounge chair easily?
- yes no Are all cords, furniture and clutter kept away from walkways?
- yes no Is your furniture placement arranged for safe walking?

Living Room Suggestions

- Higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests are easier to get in and out of.
- Avoid rushing to answer the phone.
- Keep clutter, newspapers, stools, telephone and electrical cords, etc. clear of walkways.
- Fans and heaters should not be placed in walkways or in the middle of the room.
- Remove loose rugs or apply non-slip backing or secure by another means.

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Queensland Health Promotion Council. *Checklist to Help Prevent Falls in the Home.* (1997) An initiative of the Stepping Out Project under the auspices of the Blue Nursing Service.

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