

Preventing Falls Among Seniors

Tips

Falls are not just the result of getting older. Many falls can be prevented. Falls are usually caused by a number of things. By changing some of these things, you can lower your chances of falling.

You can reduce your chances of falling by doing these things:

1. Begin a regular exercise program.

Exercise is one of the most important ways to reduce your chances of falling. It makes you stronger and helps you feel better. Exercises that improve balance and coordination (like Tai Chi) are the most helpful.

Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling.

Ask your doctor or health care worker about the best type of exercise program for you.

2. Make your home safer.

About half of all falls happen at home. To make your home safer:

- Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Have grab bars put in next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Lamp shades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare.
- Have handrails and lights put in on all staircases.
- Wear shoes that give good support and have thin non-slip soles. Avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads.

3. Have your health care provider review your medicines.

Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take (including ones that don't need prescriptions such as cold medicines). As you get older, the way some medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you drowsy or light-headed



which can lead to a fall.

4. Have your vision checked.

Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition such as glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision. Poor vision can increase your chances of falling.

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[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

Falling down is a major concern for the elderly. Seniors are much more susceptible to broken bones from even the slightest fall. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimated that in 1981, over 622,000 people over age 65 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with products they live with and use everyday. Many seniors are opting to stay in their own homes as long as possible, some with the help of an in-home caregiver. But even with the help of a home companion or aide, it's important to make the home environment as safe as possible to prevent falls and injuries. A good way to start the process of making a home "senior-safe" is to visit each room in the house individually.

Each room should be free of clutter, allowing the senior a clear pathway through the room.

- Check the carpeting: shag, thick, or deep pile carpeting can be difficult to navigate on with a walker, cane or wheelchair-
- Area rugs should be secured with rubber pads or removed completely. Bare floors can become slippery as well.
- Care should be taken on bare floors to use products that won't make the floor slippery.
- Telephone and electrical cords and curtain pull strings should be secured and out of the pathway to avoid a fall.
- Stairs in the home should have a sturdy handrail or banister in place.

Poor lighting can be the cause of many falls for the elderly. Bright, well lit room and hallways can reduce the risk of injury from falls. Placing flat, illuminated light switches on the out outside of each room can allow seniors to lighten a room prior to entering-eliminating the need to stumble through a room in the darkness to locate a light switch.

Another area of safety concern for seniors is in the kitchen. As your loved one gets older and less agile consider removing items no longer used and move commonly used items to lower, easy to reach cabinets or shelves. Unbreakable dishes and cups can save accidents as well. Fire hazards are another area of major concern as it related to the elderly population. Appliances with automatic shut off features are an excellent precaution, especially for seniors that may forget to turn off appliances. Be sure that a working fire extinguisher is easily accessible. Instructions for using the

fire extinguisher should be written in easy to read, large print and placed next to the fire extinguisher. An escape route should be posted with step-by-step instructions and reviewing regularly, especially with seniors experiencing memory loss.

Whether your loved one remains home alone or with the help of a home care agency, it is important that steps are taken to ensure their safety. The amount of time that a senior can remain home can be extended by making small, inexpensive modifications. When at all possible, be sure to include your loved one in the discussions about safety modifications prior to making any changes

10 Simple Steps for a Safer Home

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help yourself or an aging loved one to be safer in their home. The simplest projects often offer some of the biggest benefits. These steps enhance your quality of life by enabling you to enjoy the **full use of your home** and **maintain your personal independence**. Click on the blue highlighted areas for more information.

1. **Remove tripping hazards** such as throw rugs and clutter in walkways. Arrange furniture so that it creates open space and clear passage. Place bed, telephone, etc. where they are easily accessible. See article, [Remove Home Hazards](#). It is also important to keep your home brightly lit to avoid tripping. See article, [Low Cost Ways to Improve Lighting in the Home](#).
2. **Add bathroom safety features**, such as using non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors and install grab bars. Having a handicap accessible bathroom is an important element of home safety as **many falls occur in the bathroom** . See articles [Bathroom Safety for Seniors](#), [Bathroom Safety Grab Bars](#), and detailed descriptions of [Handicap Access Showers](#), [Walk in Bathtubs](#), and [ADA and Accessible Shower Bases](#).
3. **Improve Mobility into and throughout your home** . This includes safety of outdoor walkways, entrances, doorways and stairs. Assistive Devices such as a cane or walker can also help your balance and mobility. Wheelchair home safety products such as portable handicap ramps help you move freely into and through your home. See articles [A Clear Path, Doors, Entrances and Walkways](#).
4. Most homes don't have the features and conveniences to make them appropriate and **safe for seniors** . By planning ahead you can make more economical decisions on what and when to make changes in your home. Improvements in remodeling technologies have resulted in many new home accessibility products, one example can be found at [Accessible Kitchens](#).
5. If you choose to remodel to increase the convenience and comfort of your home, how you select, hire and manage the independent contractor often defines a successful project. See article, [Hiring a Contractor](#).
6. For seniors living alone, a **personal medical alert system** allows a senior in distress to call for help. See article, [Elderly Medical Alarms](#) and [Elderly-Medical-Alarms.com](#).
7. Exercise regularly to increase body strength, flexibility and improve balance. Regular exercise can also help prevent depression in seniors.
8. Review all medicines with the doctor or pharmacist (both prescription and over-the-counter) to reduce side effects and interactions. Have vision checked. Be prepared for visits and be aware of the different types of health care professionals.

We also recommend a geriatric home safety assessment be performed by a professional such as an occupational therapist. Be aware of elderly medical products that assist in independent living.

9. Consider **home health care** to assist senior in higher risk activities, such as bathing. Many levels of personal, psychosocial and domestic care are available including live-in health care.
10. Don't overlook the family caregivers, caregiver burnout is a huge and growing problem, see articles [Eldercare - Caring For an Aging Parent](#), [Caring for the Caregiver](#) and [Mothering Our Mother](#).

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